楽園幻想
氷結界のエデン
細音啓
KEI SAZANE
ファンタジア文庫

穢歌の庭（エデン）に堕ち、
浮遊大陸へと昇り帰った者よ。
千年、凍てついた楽園が
お前を待っていた――
氷結鏡界のエデン
楽園幻想

氷結鏡界が
突破されました！
魔笛汚染者、多数！

幽幻種統率個体の
位置を計測中……

これ以上、
一体の突破も
許すな！

飛行速度から逆算し、
天結宮に到着するまで
残り――

十四分！

みんなを守りきった
その上で
俺たちも生き残る！

「来てくれたんだね……」
「ごめん、ユミィ。ずっと待たせて」

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あの日、
世界の終わりの場所で——
たしかに僕(ぼく)は、穢歌(エデン)の庭に流れる歌声を聴(き)いていた。

Prologue: Floating Continent - Orbie Clar

—Ice cold rain.

The pain seems to go deep into the marrows just by being drenched by it. It was as though crystallized ice had rained down..... That was how icy the downpour was.

The crazy torrents were like tears of heaven, that nearly chiseled through the roofs. From the surrounding came the sound of rumbling water, which had exceeded what should be the sound of rainfall - calling it a waterfall would have been more appropriate.

For how long had it been raining?

The rainfall from the distant borders of the sky had already broken all previous records. However, the rain did not seem to be waning at all.

da

On the dark road at night, appeared a tiny ripple.

Accompanied by the roars of the rain, the public lights shone on a certain object. Beneath the blurry lights, crawls a black shadow on the road filled with water.

—It was a teenage boy.

Prologue

Approximately fourteen or fifteen years-old. His tea-red colored hair that is close to purple, reflected the brilliance of the night lights.

"..... Ugh..... Uh Ugh....."

The teenage boy let out a soundless moan, and continued crawling in the icy downpour. What looks like a ceremonial coat was already in tatters, revealing his skin drenched in blood.

..... *siii*!

A sound of burning was mixed between the sounds of the rain. On the road where the teenager had crawled past, the trail was slowly dissolving, as though it was splashed by corrosive acid.

A thin layer of dark purple mist envelops his body, as if to suggest the cause for the strange happenings. It was like his body had been controlled and cursed by some unknown things.

"..... Ugh..... Ah....."

For a typical person, he probably could not have survived. But the teenager continued forward.

He dragged on his dying body, and willed it inches forward, again and again.

His destination was an empty public shed in front of him.

Prologue

If he could reach there, he could perhaps shelter himself from the stabs of the icy rain. Even for his bleeding wounds, he would have to treat them there as well.

Five meters..... Four meters..... .... Three meters.

Two meters. At a distance where he was just within reach at the shed's door, the teenager could hold on no longer, and collapsed head down into a puddle on the road.

Huge amounts of blood flowed out with the rain. His face was buried in the muddy water.

The teenager did not wipe them off - his whole body was just lying there motionless. No, he could not move. The huge amount of blood lost, together with the icy downpour, had caused him to be unable to continue moving.

..... *da*

On the dark road at night, came yet another tiny ripple.

Beneath the lights that are illuminating the roads, a silhouette of a person appeared.

"....."

Hearing the footsteps, the collapsed teenager lifted his head faintly.

It was silhouette of a person, who was wearing a tight-fitting vestment, despite the freezing night.

Prologue

As the lights were not strong enough, one could not make out the appearance of that person in detail. However, from the voluptuous curves as well as the seductive figure, even a child could have recognized that the person was a female.

"—Welcome back to the floating continent - Orbie Clar."

The lady looked into the sky, her luscious lips gave a slight smile.

She was a young lady. Judging from her voice, she may not even be twenty-five yet.

"I had been waiting for you. Waiting for your return..... That feeling, it is like waiting for the return of my disappeared lover."

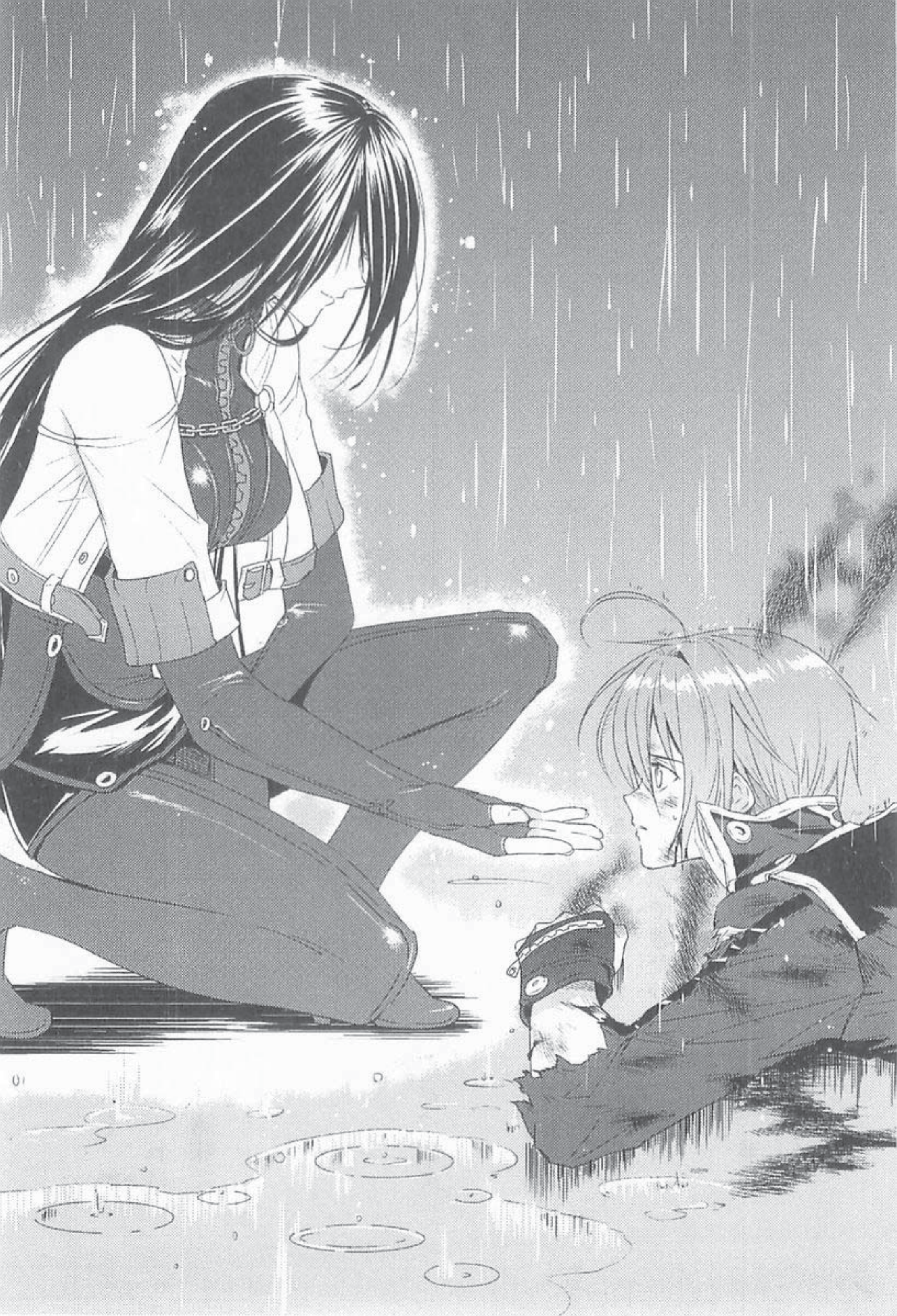
—A mysterious scene.

The rain bounced away from the lady's body while shining in bright light, before it even managed to strike on her.

As though there was an invisible barrier of light that separated her from the rain.

"....."

With a pair of eyes that had lost their focus, the teenager looked at the lady in front of him.



Prologue

"Ah, you do not even have the strength to reply?"

The lady stretched out her hand towards the teenager. At that instant-

—*zzz*..... *zzz*.....

Azure sparks similar to lightning burst forth between the two of them.

"!"

She reflexively retracted her hand, but her fingertips was already left with what looked to be burnt scars.

Upon seeing the scar-

"..... Not bad."

In the darkness, the lady laughed lightly.

"Your body is filled with mateki from 'Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>' - and your mateki is strong enough to actually be on par against me. It looks like you had fallen to a rather deep level."

The body of the teenage boy gave off a strange black smoke. The lady looked at that lovingly, then reached out for the teenager with her hands yet again.

The teenager suddenly shrunk away. Upon seeing that, she gave a bitter smile.

Prologue

"You fear rejection subconsciously - that is a rather normal reaction. However, you do not have to worry, at least for now. I have done something, so that even if we are to come into contact, there will be no danger of repulsion. That is to say, if you are bearing any ill-intention towards me, I will not be able to defend myself."

"....."

The teenager maintained his collapsed state, and lifted his head to look at the lady.

His pair of blue eyes gave off a shimmer of light, as though they were trying to say something.

"I see, it looked like I was in too much of a rush just now. That's right, your sole intention of returning is so that you can see her again."

Looking into the teenager's eyes, her expressions became gentle for the first time.

With a gentle expression close to a light smile, as though she was a mother welcoming the return of her child.

"I just wish to ask you something. To which level of Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden> had you fallen into? The Fifth Mirror? Or the Sixth Mirror? Or, you had heard 'that song' which only flows in the deepest areas?"

Upon being asked that question—

Prologue

The teenager, who had been silent all these while, opened his mouth weakly. However, he did not have the strength to speak. His half-opened mouth only managed to croak out faint breaths.

"You wish to answer but your body does not allow you to? Well, it does not matter. You will understand soon enough."

She brushed her black hair with her hands, which was still dazzling despite being in the dark.

"My name is Tsali. You do not have to remember it now. One day, you will be hearing my name frequently. So for now - allow me to welcome your return once again."

Following that.

A flash of light shone from deep within her amber eyes. The lady who addressed herself as 'Tsali' grabbed hold onto the teenager's hands tightly.

"I welcome you. Oh young man, who had fallen into the Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>, and returned back to the floating continent. For a thousand years, the frozen paradise have always been waiting for you—"

On that night, floating continent - Orbie Clar had recorded the one heaviest downpours in history, something that was rarely seen.

Chapter 1: The Street where the Wind is Born

'Did night shift last night, catching up on my sleep. Come again later. — Sheltis'

Stuck on the door was a piece of note written in messy handwriting.

The furniture in his room consist of only a bed, table, chair, and a dresser. To put it nicely, it was neat and refreshing; to put it bluntly, it lacked any features worthy of mentioning. In a corner of such a room-

A teenage boy was snoozing in regulated breaths.

His slender arms are a little too slim for a guy, and his face looks slightly androgynous. The slightly purplish tea-red colored hair is not neat, and gives off the impression that it was casually snipped. From his height, his age is probably somewhere around sixteen or seventeen. However, he does look one or two years younger, from the way he was sleeping.

"Fu....."

It was not known if that was him sleep-taking, or simply him breathing.

Next to the bed he was sleeping on, was a folded apron hanging on the back of his chair. On the floor was a piece of paper that had fallen down, on which was written 'Duty timetable, Sheltis'.

Chapter 1

He had forgotten to switch off the light on the ceiling, under its illumination, only the clock next to the pillow was moving along with time. Just then-

"Shel-nii, Shel-nii!"

The door of the room opened suddenly, and a young girl peeked her head inside from the corridor.

She is a young and innocent girl roughly of the age of five to six, with a pair of eyes that is filled with happiness. Her shiny smooth black hair is tied to the back in twin tails, and there is a sky-blue scarf lightly wrapped around her neck. Her looks gives one a rather lasting impression.

After staring around the room, the girl suddenly locked her sight. The place she was looking at, was the teenage boy who was still sound asleep. After looking at that scene for some time-

"..... Ah!"

The young girl clapped her hands with a mischievous smile, and rushed into the tiny room.

"Shel-nii, Shel-nii—"

She ran towards the chair next to the bed, and used it as a platform to make a jump.

Next.

Chapter 1

"Shel-nii, time. To. Wake. Up——!"

"-Ugh?"

A dull thud.

The young girl's jump kick landed directly on the teenage boy's head.

"..... Girls are not allowed to do jump kicks."

Grabbing onto his painful head, Sheltis lifted himself out of the bed.

"Waa- this bed is awesome. The body will actually sink down?"

"That is because the bed has a memory foam material beneath it..... Wait, Yuto? Are you listening to me?"

"Eh- But....."

The young girl named 'Yuto' stopped jumping on the bed, and lifted her head to look upwards.

"Eyri-nee said that if I do that, you will definitely wake up."

"..... I woke up in a shock. In my dream just now, the fine meadow was suddenly dyed blood-red."

"But, Shel-nii has finally woke up. Let us hurry to the plaza! Eyri-nee asked Shel-nii to go there quickly."

Chapter 1

With his sleeves tugged endlessly, Sheltis climbed out of his bed unwillingly.

"The plaza? She's doing experiments again?"

"Mmm, the usual! Hurry hurry!"

Yuto waved her arms and urged on.

"Really, Eyriey just loves to bring me trouble....."

He took a short jacket and hung it on his shoulder. His white shirt and black shorts were what he was wearing while he was sleeping.

..... Really, there went his rest time, which was hard to come by.

After putting the fallen timetable back onto the table, Sheltis left the lounge.

Outdoor cafe 'The Two Swans <Albireo>' is located on the main street of the Second Residential Sector.

The so called 'cafe' was actually just a front, as the red tea served taste rather typical. It's a rather strange shop, as it is their hand-made cakes and the ever-changing daily set meals that are more popular with the customers.

"Chef, are you busy?"

Chapter 1

After instructing Yuto to wait outside, Sheltis opened the backdoor of the kitchen. Together with the sounds of the automatic dishwashers working busily, came a certain scent of red tea.

"Ara, Sheltis, are you here to volunteer your help?"

In the kitchen which was rather relaxed due to being after-lunch hours, a lady with golden-hair tied up high on her head turned her head towards Sheltis.

Even then, the knife in her hand continued chopping the vegetables.

"How can that be? Oh right, can I go out for a while? Eyriey said that she will be doing some new machine testing in the plaza again."

"That's not good. If you don't go there quickly, someone will be suffering yet again. Since the machine will be out of control anyway."

The chef placed the knife on the chopping board, then crossed her arms while giving a troubled expression. Despite her being the shopkeeper of the cafe, due to her own personal interest, she preferred others to call her chef.

"Remember to come back before the break is over. The shop is lacking in manpower."

"..... You are already that busy, and yet you have time to try out new combinations?"

While watching the back of Chef, Sheltis sighed.

Chapter 1

The kitchen was stacked with all sorts of ingredients. For the past two years being the errand-boy of the shop, Sheltis had never seen a single day with the same combination of ingredients that had been used before.

"It is not a new combination, but a 'new dish'. Fufu, please look forward to it."

Without shifting her sight, her hands began cutting the decorative fruits. In actual fact, a majority of the customers love her dishes, so that could not be helped.

"Then again, chef. What's for dinner?"

"Mumu-shellfish's Piping Hot Steak, and Jirususu-plant's Shrieking Condensed Soup."

"Putting the names of the dishes aside, ain't those ingredients a little too disgusting?"

Those huge pink spiral shells on the chopping board were Mumu-shellfish, while the bright red plants with spikes on their stems were probably Jirususu-plant.

"Ara, you can't judge a book by its cover. They are all really tasty."

Chef covered her mouth and laughed.

"Mumu-shellfish and Jirususu-plant both contain lethal poison..... but on the account of that they are cheap."

Chapter 1

"Chef-! Did you just say something?"

"Don't worry, I have cleared all toxins cleanly. They are absolutely safe."

"..... That dangerous smile of yours is hardly convincing."

"Also, it does not matter since the one to test for the poison is you, Sheltis."

"Me?"

Sheltis took a step back in shock. Just then, Chef had already turned her eyes towards the pot in front of her.

"Alright, stop talking about such silly stuff. Hurry up and get Eyriey back. I cannot handle everything without the help from you both."

"And here I go..... before I am forced to test for any poison."

Bidding goodbye to Chef, who was waving her hands, Sheltis left the kitchen.

Chapter 1

−The winds were very comfortable.

A gust of wind rustled his tea-red hair, as though it was trying to give him a push from behind.

"..... Has it been two years since I have came to the living sector, away from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>?"

Sheltis, who was standing at the side of the main street with a sense of loss, lifted his head up.

The cotton-like clouds were blown into pieces by the blowing winds, then they each flew in their own directions. Regardless of rain or shine, or even snow, there was never a single day where the streets do not have winds blowing.

That is the trait of the city- no, the continent where all humans live in.

Floating continent - Orbie Clar.

That is the name of the continent beneath their feet, and at the same time, the name of the world.

The continent floating in the skies ten-thousand meters above the everlasting frozen seas - that is what Orbie Clar, the only land where humans can live on.

No one knows how, or why, the continent floats in the sky. However, according to legends, this continent has been floating above the frozen world ever since a thousand years ago.

Chapter 1

Since history has begun to be recorded down, humans has always been living on this piece of floating continent.

Countless floating islands around Orbie Clar have huge windmills installed on them, to harness on the endless wind energy to produce electricity.

The electricity will then be sent to Orbie Clar via electric cables from the island to the main continent.

Thus, the civilization has naturally moved itself towards the age of machinery. The bikes and cars travelling along the roads are mostly electric-powered floating vehicles, that moves while floating a few centimeters above the ground. Lifting his head towards the sky, one can see the streamlined aircraft gliding through the sky gracefully.

"..... Right, where did Yuto go?"

Hearing the sounds of footsteps behind him, Sheltis turned to his back, and saw a young girl running towards him in stumbling steps.

"Shel-nii, are you ready?"

"Mmmm, we can leave now."

Yuto firmly attached herself to Sheltis the moment he nodded.

"Shel-nii, I want that!"

The young girl was hopping about, while stretching her arms out at the same time. What did she mean? She wished to walk while holding

hands at the same time? Just when Sheltis was about to ask, Yuto lifted her head and smiled.

"Yuto wants a ride."

"Ah- I see."

He knelt down, placed the girl onto his shoulders, then stood up once again.

"Waa- this is high! I am taller than Shel-nii!"

"W-Wait Yuto! Don't move about, or I can't stand steadily."

After calming down the excited girl on his shoulders, Sheltis began to walk towards the northern end of the main street.

The roads on the floating continent are nearly all paved with light greyish-green bricks. It is said that the surface, which shines in a bright silver under the rays of the sun, is being regulated by some thermostat, which gives it the ability to maintain a comfortable temperature despite the seasonal changes.

"Shel-nii, look behind you. The weather is great, and we can see the tower clearly!"

"Hmm.....?"

Hearing Yuto's words, he turned his body backwards.

Chapter 1

At a considerable distance apart from the Second Residential Sector, in the center of the floating continent-

Stood a huge white tower that goes into the into the sky.

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

Built in the center of the Orbie Clar, it is the largest structure on the continent.

It is two thousand meters tall, with a total of two hundred and ninety one stories. It is a tower that stretches past the heights of the birds and the clouds, extending straight towards the skies.

"Yuto still remembers what Shel-nii had said to me. Queen-sama is at the highest story of the tower, while the level below are the five Priestess-sama!"

The Queen and the five Priestess. There is not one who lives in Orbie Clar that does not know them. That towering Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, is a tower built specially for them.

That's right. That is because they are in charge of the 'barriers' which protects this floating continent-

"Mmm....."

"Eh? Shel-nii hates that tower? Yuto likes it a lot - its glittering look is really pretty."

"I don't hate it..... It's just that I had strong memories of there."

Chapter 1

—Ymy, how are you doing?

Under the glaring sunlight, Sheltis narrowed his eyes and looked at the peak of the tower.

—Ever since I have came to the living sector, I understand even more strongly about the fact that humans can only live such a peaceful life on the floating continents due to the relentless hard work of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

"Memories? Shel-nii had been to that tower before?"

Carrying Yuto, who had her mouth wide in surprise, Sheltis shook his head while smiling with a hint of bitterness.

"That is something that happened years ago. Alright, Eyriey is still waiting for us at the plaza, right? We will be scolded by her again if we don't go there quickly."

"Ah, that's right! Shel-nii, hurry up! Run!"

"Yes yes..... Yuto, I think you have forgotten about it cleanly."

He turned back towards the direction of the plaza.

With his back against the huge tower, Sheltis began to walk.

***

"Isn't it great, Shel-nii! There are a lot of pretty flags!"

Upon reaching the plaza, Yuto began to exclaim happily.

"..... I see, the Festival of the Stars is about to approach."

After putting Yuto onto the ground, Sheltis took a look around the plaza.

Having left the man-made pavements, the huge green pasture greeted them before their eyes.

Len's Plaza-

In the huge empty space wide enough to hold a short-distance sprinting competition, the dark green turf seemed lively under the good care of the people, and children were running about bare-footed. At the sides of the plaza, were flags of different colors fluttering in the winds. Below the flags, were all sorts of simple stalls, lined up together.

The countless flags and stalls were probably in preparation for the festival that was about to be held on the plaza.

"How's it, Shel-nii? I really look forward to the festival! I heard there are lots of stalls selling things to eat!"

"..... Before that, we have something more pressing to deal with."

Sheltis crossed his arms, and looked in front of him.

Chapter 1

A huge metallic-grey robot was chasing a teenage girl who was wearing an overalls.

"Sh..... Sheltis! Hurry up and save me——!"

That was a robot with a body full of spikes, which looked like it was made of countless thin sharp metallic needles.

Its height was about as tall as Sheltis. And it was nimbly chasing the girl who was desperately fleeing, with speed and smooth actions unlike that of a machine.

"Ah. Its actions are really smooth this time round. Eyriey must have put in quite a lot of effort, right?"

"W..... Wait, Sheltis! Now is not the time for you to be impressed..... Whoa! I-It hurts! It really hurts! Stop seeking shelter there, come and help me quick~~~~~!"

After being poked by the robot's sharp fingers in the back, Eyriey yelled while looking back.

With a pair of rich brown eyes, a small body frame with a head full of untidily cut orange hair. She is one year younger than Sheltis, and is an strange sixteen year-old teenage girl who loves to research on machines.

"Then again, it is really impressive this time. Don't you think so, Yuto?"

Chapter 1

He looked at the young girl next to him. Yuto's eyes were sparkling brightly as well.

"Mmm. Eyri-nee is really good!"

"St..... Stop talking, hurry up and think of something~~~~"

In the mechanized Orbie Clar, exists many robots that can accurately replicate the actions of a human being. Even so, they require a certain level of technical skills to be built. Eyriey was probably the only person out of the whole floating continent who build them from scratch, purely through her personal interests.

"..... Problem is, Eyriey's machines always goes out of control unexpectedly."

After observing for a while, the machine still shown no sign of stopping.

She was always building her machines on the plaza, and they had always went out of control for some unknown reasons. The people on the plaza were thus used to such a scene, and many were even cheering on the two-man chase. There was no one who was afraid.

"Then again, what should I do? The usual?"

"Th..... That's right! Press the stop button behind that fella's back!"

"I am thinking, why didn't you make a remote control that can stop it from afar?"

Chapter 1

"The machine lost control just when I was about to make one-"

..... I say, you should at least make the remote first.

Sheltis swallowed the words that were about to come out, and turned them into a sigh of breath.

"Whatever. Yuto, hide at somewhere first. It is dangerous here."

After Yuto had left, he walked towards the robot.

..... Things were slightly more troublesome than usual.

Even though it looked rather hilarious while chasing Eyriey, the robot had a strong engine powering its body, which was not to be ignored. After all, its power is enough to drive a metal frame weighing over a few hundred kilograms. Even a grown adult will fly quite a distance if hit by its arms.

"Alright. First....."

—*thud*. He began his run by lightly kicking off against the ground, then slowly increased his speed. The winds brushed past his ears, while the scenery flowed past him in a blur.

"Kneel down!"

Not waiting for Eyriey to do so, Sheltis' tip of the foot kicked hard against the turf.

Chapter 1

A leap that was much higher than the height of a grown man or the robot, as though there was no gravity. Sheltis' right foot landed wickedly on the shoulders of the robot, which was about to reach Eyriey.

creak. The processed metal sheet bent with the sound, and the robot's posture was ruined. However, it was not stopping down. Just when Sheltis landed, the opponent's eyes locked onto him.

"Tough..... A simple kick will not make it stop?"

He twisted his body to avoid the incoming left fist, then looked at the assaulting arms that were moving at him like a pair of pincers. The huge mechanical limbs, thin as timber, were coming towards him at a blind angle from above his head.....

ta!

A faint sound of landing. At then, onlookers who had witnessed everything from the beginning were holding their breaths. That was because the teenage boy's silhouette had blurred in an instant - in the blink of an eye, he had leaped up onto the arms of the robot.

It was all done in an instant. He would be swept away by the arm of the robot should there be any mistake. A normal person's visual acuity and reflexes, would definitely not have allowed him to do all the astounding actions.

"Oosh."

Chapter 1

He stepped onto the shoulders of the robot after jumping from its arms, and placed his hand on its head. With that, he somersaulted once in the air, then landed on the back of the robot..... Was that the button?

He pressed on a red button protruding from its back. In an instant, the robot stopped moving.

"Right, a huge success..... Eh?"

A strange feeling flashed past his mind, causing Sheltis to blink and stay rooted on the ground.

Despite it being motionless, the robot somehow began to vibrate slightly. That was weird. Typically speaking, the stop button should have been able to stop all moving mechanisms.

"Ah, Sheltis! Hold on a second!"

Eyriey's words broke the silence.

"Please press the green button, as the red one is the emergency self-destruct button."

"..... What did you just say?"

"I said, the 'stop' button is the green one. Do not ever press on the red button."

..... What did I just press?

Sheltis said nothing, and looked at the back of the robot again.

Beneath the huge red button, stood a small green one. Upon closer inspection, the red button had 'Do not press!' written on it in untidy handwriting.

"Could it be that you had already pressed it?"

"Don't install something as dangerous as that——!"

Without any time to run, Sheltis was engulfed by the black smoke emitted from the robot.

"Really- a normal person will not press on a button as obvious as that. Red is the color of warning. Isn't that right, Yuto?"

"Yes, Eyri-nee."

Yuto and Eyriey were walking happily together hand-in-hand.

"..... Well I guess I am wrong for not confirming carefully."

After a while, Sheltis finally caught up with the two of them.

"Mmm? Ahh, don't worry. It is named as the self-destruct button, but in reality, it is just an ordinary device produces smoke."

"I don't think that's what the problem is!"

He waved his arms with force, and made a firm protest. Despite saying that, as he had immediately jumped away, his body was not blackened by the smoke.

"But still, thanks to you, I was finally saved."

With her overalls full of oil stains, Eyriey said while smiling.

"..... Upon facing that sort of smile, I really can't get mad at you."

"Mmm? Sheltis, what's wrong?"

"No, this..... is nothing."

Sheltis felt really embarrassed by her stare, and turned away subconsciously..... That's right, ultimately, he was being involved in things like this out of his own free will. Even though he was busy every single day, deep down it felt quite fulfilling. In the short two years since he has came to the living sector, his current lifestyle was not too bad as well.

"Speaking of that, Shel-nii is really awesome! Everyone was praising about how impressive Shel-nii was!"

What Yuto was talking about was probably what had happened at the plaza.

"Really? I thought it was something rather ordinary."

"No no, stop joking."

Chapter 1

Eyriey shook her head.

"I am drenched in cold sweat just by thinking of myself rushing straight at a berserk robot. Its horsepower is not something to joke about. Sheltis did avoid it all right, but if you had been kicked by it, I dare not think about the consequences..... How dangerous!"

"..... Since you said so, then make a smaller robot next time. So that you will not have to worry even if it runs out of control."

Just then, Yuto prodded his back. After getting the girl to sit on his shoulders, Sheltis resumed his steps.

"What can I do? If I did not do tests on a robot of that size, I will not be able to know the actual running conditions of the moving mechanisms. But thanks to that, I can probably finish the customization of the bike before the coming weekend."

"Weekend?"

Sheltis pondered for a moment. He had no idea what it meant by Eyriey's customization of the bike. Before the weekend..... Is there something happening during then?

"You had forgotten? Didn't everyone agree on going for a barbecue this weekend?"

"Everyone?"

"That's Yuto, Eyri-nee and Shel-nii-"

Yuto, who was on his shoulders, emphasized that point by moving her legs about.

"I have not heard about it at all."

"That's strange. Yuto did not inform Sheltis about it?"

"Eryi-nee's the one who did not tell Shel-nii?"

With that, both girls gave a stunned expression at the same time. It looked like both of them had expected the other person to inform Sheltis.

"..... Whatever. Weekend, that's the day after tomorrow, right? That was quite a sudden decision - will the shop be able to cope?"

He thought about Chef, who was probably waiting for his return in the kitchen of 'The Two Swans <Albireo>'. If both himself and Eyriey were to take leave on the same day, she will be the only person left in the shop.

"Mmm, I had told her about it, so no worries. Just that Chef had said, 'Better be well prepared, upon returning back here!'."

"Chef was angry? She must have been."

"Doesn't matter. There is a saying, pain comes after gain."

Upon hearing Eyriey talking about it in such a relaxed manner, Sheltis could not help but hug his head and moaned, "My head, which was kicked by Yuto earlier, have began to hurt again."

Chapter 1

The shining stars looked like jewels that were embedded in the night sky.

After the sun had set, when people on the streets became scarce, 'The Two Swans <Alberio>' was about to close down as well. The shop does not have a fixed time to close down. Instead, they would only do so when there are no more customers visiting them.

"No matter how mechanized we are, in the end, it is only us humans that can carry out tasks like these."

He wiped the tables on the street one by one, then proceeded to gather the fold-able chairs before shifting the tables back into the shop. It was rather time consuming, as they made up quite a number.

"Alright, it's done!"

Sheltis stopped and took a brief look at his surroundings, before lifting his head to look into the sky.

—The stars were very bright.

In the morning, the sky was clear and cloudless; at night, it was a starry sky without any obstructions.

There was not a moment where there is no winds blowing on the floating continent Orbie Clar. As such, there are rarely clouds that stayed above the lands of Orbie Clar for too long. Even though there are frequent rains throughout the year, the rains are not heavy. Even if it is to rain suddenly, one will just need to spend some time in the

resting areas located throughout the living sector, and the skies will clear before they know it.

"Chef, I am done packing-"

"Thank you for your hard work, you can clock out now. Can you please help call Eyriey over?"

Chef's voice came from inside the shop.

"Mmm. Eyriey should probably be in her room now."

He cleared the cleaning cloths on the table, and walked into the shop. Moving along the passage-way for staff use, he walked towards the staff's resting quarters located at the annex.

There are a total of three people working in 'The Two Swans <Alberio>'. Aside from Chef, who is the boss as well, the other two are temporary hires. Sheltis is one of them, and his task is to mainly clean the dishes or do other things, like being a waiter.

The other temporary worker is Eyriey, who, like himself, lives at the staff's quarters.

"Eyriey, are you there?"

"Come in, the door's not locked-"

At the instance the door opened, a pungent smell of machine oil and exhaust came gushing in.

Chapter 1

Uonuonuon..... the sound of exhaust akin to an insect's flapping of wings, came from the monitors located on all corners of the room, as well as the giant computers connected to them.

"Whoa! Could it be that your room has been upgraded yet again?"

Looking downwards, tens of cables entwined together on the floor.

"Ehehe, I have fixed up a new computer with my salary that I had obtained earlier. The processing speed has increased by two folds."

"..... What's the use of that?"

"Speed is what machines are all about. Isn't that much cooler!"

The teenage girl in overalls stood up from her chair, while sounding rather pleased.

"Well then, I have a good news for you, Eyriey. The dishwasher in the shop is behaving rather strangely."

"No way?"

"Also, a few buttons on the cash register are damaged, and the lights in the toilet are blinking."

"Ahh— how irritating, to pick a crucial time like this!"

Eyriey pulled her hair with a bitter face. Her job is to maintain the store's utilities. Her job scope ranged from repairs of machinery, to

maintaining the interior decors. Her work load is typically small, but emergencies like that do occur occasionally.

"..... There is no choice, I'll hurry back after the repairs."

"Crucial time?"

"Mmm, this this!"

She pointed to the screen in front of them.

On the green screen, there was a complicated rectangular casing, which was drawn using a cursor.

"It's the experiment in the day. The engine driving the robot had worked really well during its operation at the plaza. I should be able to finish the final adjustments by tonight."

"You are going to install it on the transport that we are gonna use for the barbecue?"

"That's right, since it will not do if we do not utilize it fully. Just wait and see. It will be a comfortable ride."

"I'll be very happy if it does not go out of control..... Ah, speaking of that."

While sitting on the chair at the corner of the room, Sheltis thought of the young girl with her sky-blue scarf.

"Is Yuto free?"

"Mmm, she says she can go."

Though she loves to stick close to him, Yuto is neither his blood-related younger sister, nor is she a friend whom he had known for a long time. Different from the two who live in 'The Two Swans <Alberio>', it looks like Yuto has her own house to return to.

"I see....."

"What's wrong? You suddenly have that worn-out look on your face."

Eyriey crossed her arms and moved her face closer.

Facing such an innocent-looking act, Sheltis shook his head and smiled.

"No, I am just sighing. I have known Eyriey and Yuto for two years already."

It had been two years since he was forcefully brought to the Second Residential Sector. Back then, while the homeless Sheltis was wandering along the streets, he accidentally came across the notice of hiring posted by 'The Two Swans <Alberio>'. Knowing Eyriey there was the start to everything.

"Since the first time we had met, Eyriey has been interested in machines."

"Of course. Honestly though, Sheltis has really changed a lot. The first time I saw you, your expressions were so moody, it looked like you were half dead. You would not answer to anything I asked."

"..... That was because the blow of being exiled from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> was something too huge for me."

"Exiled?"

"Ah, nothing..... I am just mumbling to myself."

—The things that had happened two years ago. Even if he was to say it right then, it would probably just come as a shock for Eyriey.

There was no need to tell anyone about the things that happened between him and Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. As for those words which he had accidentally let slip just now, it looked like Eyriey did not manage to hear it, due to them being too soft.

"Right, why don't we change the topic."

With that, she handed a cup to Sheltis. The hot steam gave a sweet-smelling fragrance. She had added in a small amount of honey in replacement for sugar into the red tea - that is her favorite way of brewing tea.

"Hmm?"

"Sheltis, do you have a girl whom you like? I am talking about the subject of love."

At that instant, Sheltis spouted out the tea which he had just drank.

"Whoa, what's with that! The screens will be ruined by that!"

"That is because you asked such a weird question all of the sudden!"

"Really. Well, what's your answer? I am really concerned about it-"

"..... I choose to exercise my right to remain silent."

"Fufu, that reaction of yours - it means there is someone."

Seeing how Eyriey's eyes were sparkling with interest, Sheltis subconsciously shifted his sight downwards. That was not due to him being embarrassed. Rather, he himself does not know what the real answer was.

"However, I don't think we will ever get to see each other again."

"Ara. Why is that so?"

"It's complicated, so simply put..... I'll probably be giving her trouble if I am to see her now. The reason for me coming to the living sector - that is probably the biggest reason."

That's right. Perhaps, he was an unforgivable existence, even at the living sector.

—That is because, Ymy is the exact opposite of me. She is the Priestess whom everyone on the floating continent respects.

Chapter 1

"Ohh- That girl lives in the Second Residential Sector as well?"

"No. She's in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>."

"Mmm? So she works in that huge tower huh. A staff there?"

Eyriey's finger touched the screen in front of her.

The screen changed, and on it appeared a tall white tower.

"You can probably call her that. Though there is some minute difference. Oh right, why are you asking that all of the sudden?"

"Mmm- it's nothing much really. I guess you can say that I am curious..... Strange, why is your face red, Sheltis? Ah, could it be that Sheltis had thought that I am interested in you, and thus I was asking those things? How's that? Am I right?"

"N..... Nothing of that sort....."

Sheltis hurriedly waved both of his hands to deny it, but that only made her smile even more delightedly.

"Ahaha, did I make you misunderstand things? I am sorry, but I totally do not see Sheltis as a subject of love. It is much more interesting to research on machines instead."

"..... That sounds really cruel."

"Alright, the joke ends here. Truthfully speaking-"

Chapter 1

Eyriey put her hands together and stretched them upwards, and put on a relaxed posture.

"I do enjoy playing with Yuto and Sheltis, you know?"

Looking at that simple smile, Sheltis was speechless for a moment. He had once again came to realize - at the living sector, there too were friends of his, who are willing to accept him with a truthful smile.

"What about Sheltis?'

After a moment of consideration - or rather, he pretended to consider.

"I don't find it bad."

"Really, then there's no problems. I really look forward to the barbecue during the weekends. Ah, Sheltis is to be in charge of the preparation of meat. It does not matter if there are less vegetables, but please get some top-quality meat!"

"..... Can I retract my statement?"

Chapter 1

The white rays unique to the early mornings were shining softly on the turf below their feet.

The mist that lingered on the plaza was probably formed from the water vapors of rain from the previous night. The scent of the grass accompanied the damp cool air.

Len's Plaza. Despite being there only two days ago, unlike then, there was barely anyone around.

"As expected of the early mornings."

Sheltis stretched his arms and took a deep breath, then lifted his head and looked at the clock-tower located at the side of the plaza.

They were to meet at seven in the morning at the plaza. As both Yuto and Eyriey are normally punctual, both of them should be about to arrive soon- just when he was thinking of that.

A sounds of fast-paced steps echoed in the plaza.

"Shel-nii, I've made you wait!"

It was the familiar face of a girl in the age of five or six. Her neck has her usual sky blue scarf, while her clothes were a light red one-piece dress and a pair of white shoes. It looked like they were her outdoor clothes, since the colors were brighter than usual.

"Right right, where is Eyri-nee?"

Yuto raised her arms and jump about.

Chapter 1

"I think she should be here soon..... There, here she comes."

A huge object was approaching them, together with the sharp sounds of the winds. From afar, it looked like a metallic-grey block of thing, but upon getting closer, its shape grew more apparent as well.

It was a huge electric powered vehicle.

Looking at its front, Yuto could not help but exclaimed,

"Wow..... what a huge bike!"

It was a three-wheeled electric powered vehicle, with a front wheel and two back wheels. The body of the vehicle is painted with a heavy metallic paint. Its width is wide enough to allow three grown man to sit along it side-by-side. Its height is roughly around Sheltis' shoulders.

"Sorry for making you guys wait- Good morning!"

Eyriey jumped down from the driving seat without waiting for the wheels to stop. She was still wearing that greasy overalls, but for that girl, that was the attire most suitable for her.

"Eyriey, you made this whole thing by yourself?"

"That's right! I had bought parts from the junk store, and assembled it by myself. It's really cheap!"

She proudly patted on the seats of the the vehicle. If not for him being used to the robots that Eyriey had made, Sheltis would definitely question about how complete the vehicle was.

"Then again, where are we going in that huge thing?"

"Eh? Ah, it seemed like I had forgotten to tell you about it. It's the natural park at the outskirts of the nature sector. There should not be any dangerous creatures there, no matter what happens."

From the middle of the floating continent, it is divided into three sectors in this sequence.

Firstly is the center of the continent, the huge tower that stretched straight into the skies - Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

Surrounding it, is the first sector, or the so called 'living sectors', where humans lived. The living sector is then again divided into the First Area, the Second Area and the Third Area, from the closest to the furthest away from the center. Though that is just something for easily locating the specific locations in the living sectors.

The next is the second sector, which is named as the 'nature sector', where the environments are controlled. Simply put, it is a man-made nature park. People will normally visit there for sight-seeing or a holiday.

Even further away, are the areas encircling the borders of the floating continent, the third sector which is named as the 'ecosystem-conservation sector <biotope>'. As people rarely set foot on there, it still retains the original state of the ecosystem. Due to the presence of

many wild and dangerous creatures, one must obtain permission from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> before they are allowed to enter the area.

—That's great. There would be no problems if it was the nature sector.

"Ah- I feel relieved. I thought we are going to the ecosystem-conservation sector <biotope>."

"That is part of the plan as well."

"..... Stop joking. There are the nests of Earth Dragons at the ecosystem-conservation sector."

"Uh- Dragon hunting sounds rather interesting."

..... I had nearly lost my life when I was sent there on a mission with Leon at the age of fourteen.

Sheltis swallowed the words back into his heart without showing any expressions.

"Forget it, in any case, let's go! Just put the stuff at the boot at the back. Done? Well then, Yuto shall take the front seat, while Sheltis shall take the back seat."

Upon her urging him, Sheltis sat on the red colored seat.

"Mmm, remember to fasten your seat-belts. Has Yuto fasten hers?"

"Done—!"

Chapter 1

Both Yuto and Eyriey secured their seat-belts in front of their chest. Upon seeing that, Sheltis felt a chill behind his back.

..... Seat-belts? Do a three-wheeled vehicle have things like seat-belts?

"Sheltis, hurry up and fasten on yours as well, or you will be blown away."

"Blown away?"

"Because, once this thing is activated, it can reach a speed of over a hundred kilometers an hour, in a matter of six seconds."

"W..... Wait! If that is the case-"

He could not help but to jump off his seat.

The laws of the continent state that the maximum speed limit for civilian vehicles are eighty kilometers an hour. If they are traveling on the roads of the living sector, the speed is peaked at forty. If anyone is to exceed more than ten kilometers per hour over the legal speed, the automated patrols that are in the sky will sound their sirens and chase him to the world's end.

"The patrols....."

"I know that. Once they have found their prey, they will chase it at a speed of hundred-fifty kilometers an hour, right?"

"Since you know that-"

Chapter 1

Before he had managed to finish talking, Eyriey lifted her clenched fists.

"This lovely vehicle of mine can reach a maximum speed of a hundred-eighty kilometers an hour while carrying three passengers. We can easily shake them off even if they discover us."

"Doesn't that make things worse!"

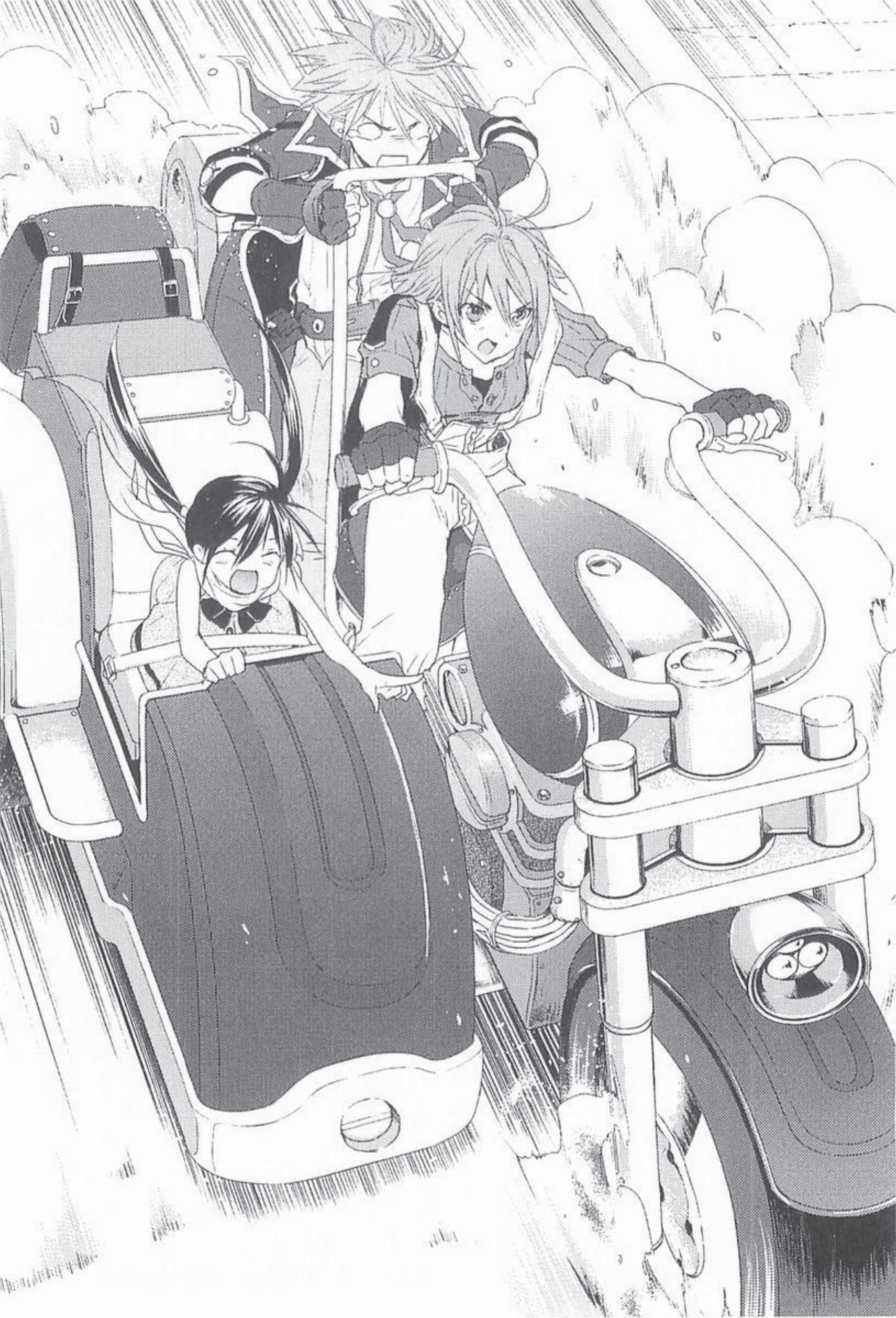
"That's how it is. Let us set off for the barbecue!"

"Yey! Move out!"

"Eh? Ehhhh? Even Yuto is joining in? R..... Right..... I have not fastened my seat-belt yet—!"

"Don't talk while we are accelerating, or you will bite your tongue."

The hissing sounds of the engine rang, and the illegally customized bike shot forward like a raging bullet. The sounds of the metallic chassis ripping through the air, together with the cheers of two young girls and Sheltis' horrified screams, rang through the plaza in the early morning.



Chapter 1

In front of their eyes, laid a green world.

Different from the turfs of the plaza, various different plants of all shapes and sizes took up each and every inch of view. A forest of trees extended endlessly on their right.

From the sky came the invigorating cries of birds. On the meadows, cute animals were running about in a small groups.

—The southern side of the nature sector, Park Number Four.

"This is probably my first time here."

Grabbing onto the baggage on the back of the vehicle with one of his hands, Sheltis glanced through the surroundings.

Despite being named as a nature's park, the atmosphere there is still quite similar to that of the third sector's ecosystem-conservation sector <biotope>. The only difference is that there are no beasts there that would attack humans.

"Well, I have tried my best to go as deep as I can. We will probably not be of disturbance to anyone if we are to do our barbecue here."

"Eyri-nee, please~ let~ me~ go~?"

Eyriey had caught Yuto, who was about to run off happily.

"Yuto will have to help too. I have been driving since the morning, and my stomach's now grumbling. It's dead tiring to be driving for four consecutive hours."

"..... Out of which, three of them were us being chased by the patrols."

Sheltis opened the hand carrier while complaining.

He began to fix up the black barbecue pit, then proceeded to put in two to three items called 'fuel stones'. What was left was for him to press the fire button.

"Where's the ingredients for the barbecue?"

"All in the cooler box. Yuto, open it."

Yuto opened the blue box. Its interiors were divided into two parts, the top refrigerating cabinet for the vegetables, while the bottom was the freezer for the fishes or meat.

"Well then, since Sheltis had prepared for us some top quality meat, let us hurry up and barbecue them-"

"..... I'll say this first. I have already spent this month's pay on the things here today. Also, shouldn't we start barbecuing the vegetables first, since they take longer to cook?"

Sheltis had already half given up on whether he would get to eat anything, so instead he chose to take the initiative by placing the vegetables on the barbecue rack. If not, there would definitely be a heap of vegetables left over after that.

"Is the meat ready—?"

"Yuto, don't eat those half-cooked meat. Here, I'll give you some vegetables."

He stopped Yuto from trying to eat the meat in secret, and handed some vegetables over.

..... Weird, why did it feel so nostalgic?

Upon facing that scene, his heart was filled with an indescribable feeling for a short instant.

That's right. A long time ago, something similar had happened as well.

—Ymy, Leon and me, we had barbecued together before.

—Both of them are probably holding the highest positions in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>..... I will have to work harder in the living sector as well.

"Ah- Shel-nii had stopped."

Upon regaining his senses-

With her left hand grabbing her plate, and her right grabbing her fork, Yuto was standing by his side waiting, and was puffing her cheeks unhappily.

"Ah, sorry. I was dazed for a moment."

He hurriedly placed the pieces of meat and vegetables onto the barbecue rack.

"Is Sheltis tired? You do go blank suddenly sometimes."

"No, nothing of that sort-"

Just when he was shaking his head at the worried Eyriey.

—*thud*!

"!"

Sheltis suddenly dropped the utensils and plate that he was holding, and quickly turned his body to face the forest behind them.

"Wa..... Wait a second! Why did you throw the vegetables and meat away!"

"Quiet."

He stared intensely into the forest, while holding Eyriey back.

—From his neck down to his spine, he felt an intense chill, as though he was stabbed by an icicle.

Could it be.....

"Eyriey, there should be an electric spear on the vehicle for defensive use, right? Those assembly ones."

Chapter 1

"Well..... There is."

"Lend me that."

After receiving the silver colored rod-shaped item, Sheltis extended it to about his own height.

Despite being called a 'spear', the front end of the rod is of a round shape, which will discharge a strong jolt of electricity at the press of a button. It is made out of a metal alloy, and are both light and tough at the same time. It is typically used by women as a defensive weapon.

..... Though it will not be of much use, it was still better than nothing.

"Ho..... Hold on Sheltis, where are you going? It's the forest over there!"

"You two wait here. I'll be right back."

Step by step, he slowly inched towards the forest.

He got past the boundary of the forest, and was walking on a path leading slightly leftwards. After advancing a few meters, he made another turn, and finally stopped in front of a huge tree.

..... This is-

Just then, came the sound of two pairs of footsteps, stepping on the dried branches.

"Hey— Sheltis, stop running off by yourself!"

Eyriey pried away the branches and walked towards him, while grabbing on to Yuto's hand.

"Wait, Eyriey. It is better if you do not get close to here."

Sheltis raised his hands up high to stop both of them from moving closer.

"....."

"Sh.....Sheltis! Why have you been keeping quiet since just——!"

Having reached behind him, Eyriey lifted her head, and made an inaudible cry.

"..... What..... What is this?"

The trunk of a huge tree of over hundred years old had rotted into a purple color, and it was dead just like that.

At the tip of a thin branch was a leaf.

All of them had been dyed in a strange purple color, and were already rotten.

Not just that, the fallen leaves, the dried branches and even the soil - they were all giving off a purple mist. The decay had continued eroding into the neighboring trees.

"Purple mist..... could it be..... the work of 'that'.....?"

Chapter 1

A pale Eyriey stood rooted on the ground.

"....."

Sheltis knelt down in an attempt to touch the soil, which was gradually corroding to a purple-

"——Sheltis!"

But Eyriey had pulled him back by his shoulder.

"What are you thinking! You do know that you will get infected once you come into contact with that!"

"..... That's right, sorry."

He retracted his hand from the ground, and stared into the decaying scene. The traces on the ground were fresh. That thing appeared there probably an hour ago..... no, perhaps even closer. It may had just been a few minutes ago.

"Yuto, Eyriey. I think it is best if we leave here immediately. At a situation like this, it is much better if we leave it to the experts."

He stood up, and faced the two girls behind him.

"Experts..... People of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>?"

"Yup. Commoners who have discovered traces of 'that' should inform Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> immediately, and evacuate from the scene - Eyriey should know that well, right?"

That was the rule that everyone of the floating continent knows. Even then, there will not be any punishment should one does not plan to follow. However, no one can then guarantee their safety if they choose to do so.

"That's how it is. Alright, move quickly!"

Urging on the two frightened girls, Sheltis followed them closely from behind.

..... It should be fine doing this, right?

Currently, he does not belong to Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, and is just a commoner, so there is no need for him to interfere with 'that'. He just need to leave the scene like everyone else.

"Come here, we should be safe for now."

Walking out of the forest and into the plains, the barbecue stand was there by itself, smoldering in smoke.

"What about the barbecue stand.....?"

"It's fine leaving it there. The guards from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> will recover it. Moreover, any items that could have been contaminated will need to be purified as well- What's wrong, Eyriey?"

Chapter 1

Eyriey had suddenly stopped in her tracks, and was looking at Sheltis in admiration.

"No, it's just that Sheltis is quite manly sometimes."

"..... So I am just undependable normally....."

The next instance.

The cries of the birds around them died down all of the sudden.

—It's coming!

"Yuto, Eyriey! Back down now!"

At the same time when Sheltis shouted, something dashed out of the forest near to them.

Its exterior is of black-purple, 'something' which transcends all knowledge.

"Yuugenshu? It can't be..... Why does it appear at a place so close to the city!"

Upon seeing the thing that came out of the forest, Eyriey cried out loud.

'Something' that was shrouded in a thick dark-purple mist, where a single look at it could make one feel as though he would be drained away all of his energy.

Chapter 1

One could roughly see the muscular limbs and sharp claws similar to those of a lion, from within the mist. But they had no idea if that thing was a person, a beast or a dragon. The only thing they could see clearly, was an ominous flash of blood-red light, coming out from what seemed to be the position of the eyes, on its head.

.....zz.....zzzz.....zzzzzzzzzzz.....!

The mist-like assaulter closed in with an eerily high speed. All places that it had stepped on, regardless of plants or soil, had rapidly decayed into purple. It was a mysterious existence. No one know if it was even a living thing.

It was precisely so, that people address them as 'Yuugenshu'.

"Yuto, Eyriey, both of you, get onto the vehicle quickly!"

The Yuugenshu suddenly stopped moving. What followed-

Oe/ Dia =U xeph cley, Di shela teo phes kaon
<■ ■, ■ ..... ■ ■, ■ ■ ■ , ... ■ ..... ■ ■>

A strange sound rang through the meadows, a sound that makes one associate it with the word 'curse'.

The purple mist surrounding the Yuugenshu gave off light like an amethyst. Not long after, these light gradually turned into rays thinner than strands of hair.

Chapter 1

—Mateki?

"Eyriey, run!"

"Eh?"

The rays wove themselves into a complicated spiral-shaped image, and the concentric circles were expanding outward. Eyriey was at lost on what to do, and stood rooted on the ground despite those circles expanding towards her direction.

The violet light began to intensify in color, and began to materialize-

"I'll not let you succeed!"

At that instance, Sheltis tossed out the electric spear in his hands.

Cha..... The sound of the spear stabbing into the soil. The thrown spear had pinned the Yuugenshuu onto the ground. The impact of the spear had actually caused the body of the Yuugenshu to be airborne for a brief moment. Due to the interference, the light that had engulfed the metal barbecue stand and was about to touch Eyriey, stopped expanding for a moment.

At the same time, the originally violet light began to materialize.

..... zz ..... zzzz.....

"The barbecue stand?"

Chapter 1

The stand, that could easily withstand temperatures of nearly a thousand degrees, disintegrated in a flash, like a pile of sand collapsing. Upon witnessing that scene, Eyriey's face turned deathly pale.

—Mateki.

That term is used specially on the special abilities unique only to Yuugenshu. Decay, poison, comatose and mental corruption- it is an energy wave that erodes and contaminates all living things and items of the floating continent. As a strange curse-like sound is given out during its activation, it has been given the name 'Mateki'.

"Eyriey, take this opportunity to start the engines!"

"..... Didn't you just defeat it?"

At the ends of Eyriey's sight, was the Yuugenshu pierced to the ground by the spear.

"An attack like that can't defeat that thing- hurry!"

Sheltis pointed towards the vehicle while he fixed his eyes on the monster with its mist. Yuugenshu are not something that can be easily defeated. In the past, they had been the things he was always fighting against, thus he knows that better than anyone else.

..... zz ..... zzzz ..... zzzzzzzzzzz .....!

The tip of the electric spear which skewered the Yuugenshu had began to melt, and flowed onto the ground as a pool of molten metal.

What was left, was the mist monster suffering not a single scratch.

Those bright-red eyes became even fiercer, shining like blood-red rubies.

Oe/ Dia =U xeph cley, Di shela teo phes kaon
<■ ■, ■ ..... ■ ■, ■ ■ ■ , ... ■ ..... ■ ■>

The dark-purple mist turned into a bunch of light yet again, which then transformed into millions of thin rays. The strands of rays gathered together, and formed a huge ring on the ground.

Within the domain of the light, stood a motionless Yuto, who was looking at the light below her feet.

..... It was too late. The area of mateki was way to wide, and Yuto could not escape by herself. Just as he was thinking of all that, Sheltis had already rushed into the swirling deep-purple lights.

"Shel-nii."

"Sorry, Yuto. It may hurt a little!"

Grabbing hold on the shoulder and waist of a smiling Yuto, Sheltis lifted her up in a single breath.

"Eyriey, I'll leave Yuto to you!"

Following that, he threw Yuto towards Eyriey with all his might.

Yuto flew a parabolic path in the air, and got out of the domains of mateki.

—That will do.

At then, the light of phantom had materialized.

"Sheltis, you too-!"

Eyriey's shout was engulfed by the ear-splitting sounds of the ground cracking up.

Boom. With the sounds similar to the bubbling magma, the grasslands turned white in an instant. Grounds shattered, then melted into a gooey state. Regardless of living or non-living things, the mateki of Yuugenshu will cause anything on Orbie Clar to rot and be destroyed. No matter how strong the person is, once he is exposed to mateki-

Just like that, the teenage boy who risked his all to save Yuto, had no longer any way to run.

The brilliance of the dark-purple lights cause them to not be able to look at them directly. Poisonous rays that corrupt the human body and destroy every single cells in it, had engulfed the whole of the teenage boy's body.

"..... Sheltis—!"

Chapter 1

Eyriey face was horribly pale.

There was no hope for Sheltis. No one could survive being engulfed by those poisonous rays of light.

"..... How..... How can this be....."

The situation caused the teenage girl to fall to the ground. The mist monster then locked its sight onto her.

There was no need to use its own mateki. The ground corroded by it was expanding towards the girl at a blinding pace.

In the body of mist, extend a black claw with throbbing veins-

"Don't even think of hurting them, you monster."

Just before the claw touched Eyriey, it stopped.

The teenage boy with tea-red colored hair was grabbing hold of the Yuugenshu's claws with his bare hands.

"..... Sheltis?"

Eyriey said with a trembling voice. She had just witnessed something unbelievable. The level of shock was as though she had seen someone reviving from the dead.

Yuugenshu's mateki, which destroys all trees, soil and living things within its range - despite being exposed to that sort of energy, Sheltis

was still standing there fine, and was protecting her right in front of her eyes.

"Eyriey, are you alright?"

"Eh..... But..... But..... Sheltis, you.....?"

"I am not afraid of Yuugenshu's mateki."

"—Eh?"

Sheltis lifted his right arm in front of Eyriey, and-

He wickedly struck onto the mist monster's body, which is full of deadly poison.

"———— Uuuuuuuuuuu!"

The Yuugenshu gave a painful howl, and jumped backwards.

What a strange sight. A monster which was not harmed even after being speared by a metal spear, actually had its mist disappeared by more than half of the original amount, after taking a single strike from the teenage boy's bare fist.

"..... That can't be? Why is it effective?"

"I had struck its core while it was distracted. A pity that I have no weapon with me, or else I could have shattered it in a single shot."

Chapter 1

At the body of the Yuugenshu, located at the middle of its mist body, is what looks like an amethyst core. Its size varies, but most are of a size similar to that of a human fist. A Yuugenshu will disappear with the destruction of its core.

Oe/ Dia =U xeph cley, Di shela teo phes kaon
<■ ■, ■ ..... ■ ■, ■ ■ ■ , ... ■ ..... ■ ■>

The third mateki was no longer of the barrier form, but a beam of laser after gathering and compressing the light. Evading the powerful purple beam which was obviously stronger than those of before, the young man rushed towards the Yuugenshu.

UOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

The Yuugenshu gave off a strange roar which sounded as though it could cause their ears to burst, and lifted its clawed front limbs. At the same time, Sheltis took aim at the Yuugenshu, and threw out his fist.

The shadows of both bodies passed each other, and what followed-

Crack..... kura..... ra.....

The sounds of a tough ore shattering into pieces.

The cold and clear sounds, with a hint of sorrow, echoed through the meadows.

Chapter 1

The Yuugenshu, with its core destroyed, ceased its movements, and gradually evaporated off after turning into mist.

"Sheltis, are you alright!"

"Hmm? Ahh, I am slightly hurt by its claws. Just a small scratch-"

"I'm not talking about that!"

Eyriey was pointing to the spot where the Yuugenshu had disappeared. At that place, all plants growing there had already withered, and the soil had turned purple from corruption.

"You had came into contact with Yuugenshu..... and had exposed yourself to mateki in order to protect me! We have to get to the purification center of Tenkeusu Palace <Sophia> right now! If we do not hurry, it will be too late if the contamination is to spread!"

"It is fine, there is no need to purify. What matters is that Eyriey and Yuto are alright."

"Idiot, what are you talking about-"

"No. I had said it before, Yuugenshu's mateki has no effects on my body."

At the shoulder where it was scratched by the Yuugenshu's claws, was the skin turning slightly red, but other than that, there was not a single thing to suggest that he had been contaminated.

"Your body..... no way, I have never heard anything like that. I do hear people saying, that if you have powers similar to those of the Queen and the Priestess of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, then you will be able to resist mateki."

"I don't belong to that group, but I am really fine. Don't worry."

Pressing onto his slightly bleeding shoulder, Sheltis gave Eyriey a smile.

That smile was not to make her feel at ease. Rather, it was due to Eyriey worrying about him.

"..... But."

"It's really great that you both are safe. There's nothing more important than that."

That's right. That was his heartfelt truth.

Because he had successfully saved his only friends at the living sector.

—Ymy. Perhaps, returning back to your side is just an unattainable dream.

—However, I am living fine at here, so at the very least, you do not have to worry for me over at Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

"Urm....."

Eyriey asked in her rare hesitant tone,

Chapter 1

"I have never taken the initiative and asked you that..... could it be, that Sheltis had fought with Yuugenshu before?"

"Well..... it's not a pleasant topic, you know."

Evading the stares of Eyriey that suggested that she wanted to press on further, Sheltis began to walk.

"Alright, in any case, let us go back first. It will be dangerous to continue staying here."

Intermission: Prayer

.....*plop*

Small droplets leap from the surface.

A deep blue water surface.

With colors deeper than the emerald green waters of a shoal, clearer and more vivid than the ultramarine of the deep seas.

The ceilings gave off lighting as bright as the sun - without knowing the presence of the artificial light source, one would not have thought that the place was indoors.

In a huge circular room where one can barely see the walls-

The mysterious waters were silently wobbling, and time were slowly passing by.

.....*drip*

Another tiny ripple appeared on the water surface. From a brief look, it looked like something was rising upward towards the surface beneath the blue water. A human-shaped shadow was wobbling between the ripples-

It was a girl.

Intermission

Her age is more than ten, probably sixteen or seventeen.

Her long, pale golden hair was shimmering under the lights from the ceiling. Despite her eyes being shut tightly as though she was in a deep slumber, her face still looks graceful, delicate and charming. On the whole, she struck a great balance between prettiness and cuteness.

The teenage girl was gently floating on the water surface, while revealing her stark naked body.

The smooth curves of the chest belonging to that of a girl's was rising and falling repeatedly, giving the hint that the girl was breathing. That was the only clue that showed that she is a living person.

A harmonious silence.

Not long after the girl had floated out of the surface, there was a change within the room.

"—The designated time has been exceeded. The fluid's temperature, and the osmotic pressure are both under stable conditions."

A mechanical female voice sounded along with the rays of the ceiling light.

"Body temperature, heartbeats and breathing are all within normal range. It is recommended to immediately begin the barrier training targeted against 'Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>'. Ymy, how are you feeling?"

"......Mmm."

Intermission

The girl who was being addressed as 'Ymy' opened her eyes.

With her jade colored eyes, she looked at the lighting above in a slightly dazed state.

"There is no problem, I can do it."

Ymy slowly nodded.

"Verbal confirmation from the subject has been accepted. In accordance, analyzing shinryoku..... Shinryoku's waveform, stable. ..... amplitude, stabilizing at peak levels - Inquisition of Tower's Law article number two-hundred and seventy-three, 'Barrier System' has been cleared. Transition to 'Anti-Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden> Arts' has now been acknowledged."

At the same time when that had been said, the level of the deep blue surface began to fall. The fluids in the room turned into a striking purple mist, and spread throughout the room.

After the huge amount of liquid had been totally evaporated.

"....."

Ymy remained on her grounds, and lightly tugged at her fringe, which had a droplet of water.

At her feet were small puddles of the blue fluids, but they too had evaporated into an invisible gaseous state, and spread into the room.

Intermission

"From now on, the special training against 'Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>' shall commence."

The voice notifying Ymy of the situations was still of a mechanical tone, but at the same time, it had an element of respect towards the teenage girl.

"ele So Phi-a-s Arma-Riris
<Please accept all wishes that I can grant...>"

The words with power held within them.

The lips of the teenage girl began to sing the opening sequence, which signified the activation of power. The next instance, blue particles covered her naked body as though they were blessing her.

"Activation of shinryoku confirmed - begin simulation of 'Hyouketsu Kyoukai'.

Priestess Ymy Ele Soufflenictole, please construct Seventh Heaven Rhythm <Sophia Code>."

Yu/ Uhw =C r-sanc uc Eden
<Under the foils of the slumbering Eden>

term-l-pile xel, xin, ole fusen elchel
<The falling stars, time and dreams covered the eyes and faces>

Intermission

The teenage girl was singing.

Kra..... kra..... kura.....

From all corners of the room, came the sound of freezing.

"＿＿"

The girl looked at the feet.

From her ankle onward, her feet was encased in transparent blue ice. That's right. The blue fluid that had just evaporated had slowly started to freeze. It was at an astonishing scale, where the whole giant room could be totally frozen.

xearcs let laphin yahe, bie omia hec lihit clar
<There is no key to the doors of speech, that is sketched by the transparent fingertip>

noi-roo-xin, noi melras I noe-l-habes pianic cia eyen
<In the never-ending world, the jade-like phantoms had stopped their laments>

The ice gradually crept upwards. From her ankles to her knees, then to her stomach, followed by her chest.

The girl, with more than half of her body frozen by the ice, continued singing. That was because, the dazzling frozen world was her spell,

and the requirement for the spell's activation was the prayer which she had been singing.

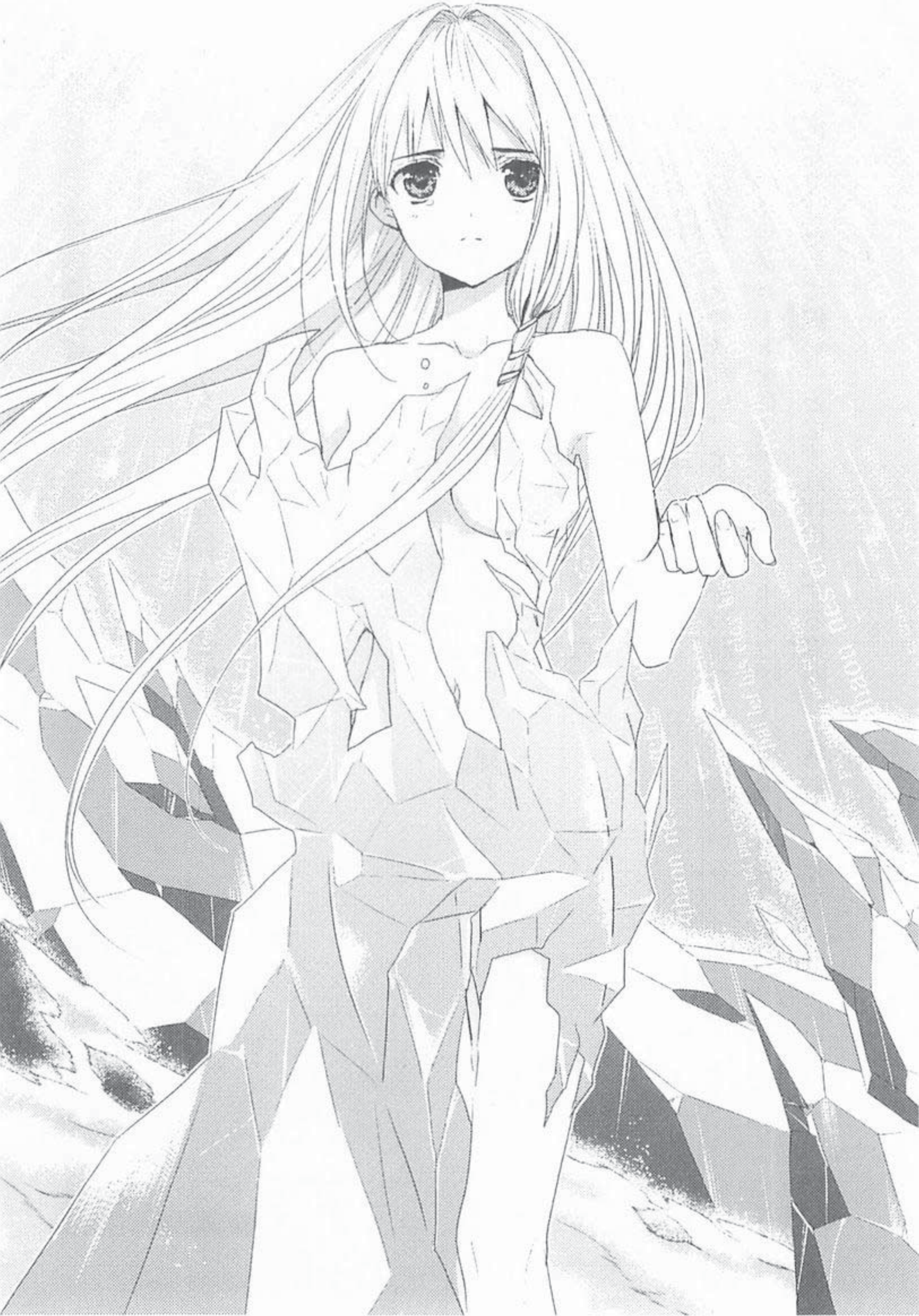
=C hypn phenoria, Eec qhaon nes ei getie, nephies paf lef bis cley kis ei roos
<Sleep, children. Your wings are still young, and branches of safety are still too far away>

=C hypn phenoria, Eec wat nes ei getie bies killis cley kis ei mihas
<Sleep, children. Your feet are still weak, and this frozen land is still too painful>

Her lips were purple from the unimaginable cold, and her body were shivering continuously. Despite so, as a Priestess, the teenage girl endured silently, without giving even a whimper.

Just when the ice crept past her chest and was about to approach her shoulders.

The girl, who until then had not moved an inch, suddenly lifted her head and looked towards the ceilings - no, the girl was looking towards the other side of the ceiling, at a place much further away.



Intermission

"Sheltis..... Can we no longer see each other again.....?"

plop

A drop of crystal clear tear slid down her cheek.

"You said that you are to become my 'Sennenshi'..... Can you really not fulfill that anymore?"

But even that drop of tear was encased by the freezing blue ice as well-

The teenage girl sank into the frozen world filled with azure brilliance.

Chapter 2: The person whom the girl is waiting for

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, two hundred and eighty seventh story-

Ka..... A strong and firm footstep rang through the passageway.

"Northern side of nature sector, Park Number Four? That is no more than ten kilometers away from the Third Living Sector."

"..... Mmm."

"There has been a lot more reports on Yuugenshu breaching Hyouketsu Kyoukai recently."

"..... Sorry, Leon."

The rhythmic sound of footsteps suddenly stopped.

"There is no need for Syun-rei to apologize, since I am existing for that very reason."

Swaying his pure white coat, the teenage boy named 'Leon' turned backwards.

Soft yet determined. The teenage boy of these two traits has a handsome face that makes both males and females turn back to take another look at him.

Chapter 2

His stout figure is coupled with a height of over hundred and eighty centimeters tall. There is no excessive fat or flab to be seen on his well-trained body. The figure of his makes one think of a well forged blade.

"The floating continent will not be able to survive without the Priestesses or the Queen. So please be more confident of yourself, Syun-rei."

"..... Mmm."

After giving a wry smile to the black-haired girl who was sticking tightly to his back, the silver-haired boy took a turn at the passageway, while regulating his pace to match that of the girl's.

"In any case, let us report that to the other Priestesses. Who is currently around?"

"..... Ymy and Meimel."

"Run should be informing Meimel about it, so we are left with Ymy huh- hmm?"

Leon stopped walking. The teenage girl, who had been hiding behind him all these while, had suddenly tugged the sides of his coat. That is her habit, which means she has something to say.

"..... Ymy is currently training. She is at the Training Level at two hundred and seventy sixth-story..... it should be done soon."

"Is that so. Then it can't be helped. We shall just wait until then."

Chapter 2

—Strange?

While sticking tightly to Leon's back, the girl named 'Syun-rei' was bewildered.

The teenage boy, who is her personal guardian, is one of the best swordsman of the floating continent, as well as the most well known training fanatic. She had originally thought that he will be sweating it out in his personal training room, until Ymy's training is over.

"I will have to inform Ymy such an important news as quickly as possible..... I'll just go to the training room later."

Leon gave a sigh. Perhaps he was thinking about the same thing.

The place he was heading to was not the elevator of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, but the spiral staircase for emergency use. It was probably so that he can more or less exercise his body by climbing the stairs.

"Syun-rei, do you want to take the elevator instead?"

Upon facing that question from Leon, Syun-rei considered for a moment. No, she had pretended to consider.

Her answer had been decided all along.

"..... I'll be with Leon."

In a rare sight, Syun-rei went to his front, and showed a light smile - the two of them are inseparable. That's right, that is the relationship between her and him.

Chapter 2

The five Priestesses who entrust their lives and their everything to their guardians, so that they can focus on praying.

And the strongest guards that put their lives on the line to protect all of these, the Sennenshi.

Priestess Syun-rei, and her guardian, Sennenshi Leon.

Along with the neat pacing and sound of footsteps, the two of them walked down the spiraling stairs of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> together.

***

A world of ice.

At a temperature tens of degrees below zero, where all time of life stops. Without any need of special machines, the temperature was maintained purely by the azure ice which filled the room.

A silent space, where even air would not flow.

"It has been thirty-six hours since the activation of the barrier. The training ends here.

It has been hard on you, Priestess Ymy Ele Soufflenictole."

A mechanical voice came from the ceiling that gave off a blinding light.

Chapter 2

..... kra..... pra..... kura.....

The azure ice which filled the room began to crack.

A hair-like crack of merely a few millimeters. It gradually widened. Initially, it was just on the surface of the azure ice, but it spread into the interiors of the ice as well-

The huge azure ice, which covered over an astonishing area of thousands of square meters, cracked open. The small pieces of ice that flew into the air became smaller and smaller.

Pacha

On the leftover waters on the ground, stood a girl with light-golden hair, that is close to a full brilliance of real gold.

"..... Fu....."

She looked into the ceiling, extended her arms out wide, and took a deep breath.

Her body had been frozen for thirty six consecutive hours. In that frozen state, the body stops breathing as well, and it will not breathe if one does not do so deliberately.

After a few repeated breaths, she inhaled in yet another deep breath.

"Co..... Coldddddddd!!"

Hugging onto her wet naked body, Ymy cried out.

Chapter 2

"So cold..... I am..... nearly..... frozen!"

The barriers of ice that were created out of the shinryoku from her body.

For a barrier spell that locks down 'Yuugenshu', even if it is of a simplified form for training purposes, it still brings about a huge burden on the physical and mental state of the caster.

"..... It feels so terrible every single time."

The body's shivering had not stopped.

With her pale white lips, she quickly walked into the showering room, which was separated by a door.

Upon opening the door, the scent of body soap, together with the warm mist of water, brushed past her hair. At the same time, waters of moderate temperature began falling down from the shower head on the ceiling.

Shaaaaaa..... The sounds of the water spray, similar to that of a rain, were comforting to the ears.

Ymy closed her eyes to enjoy the feeling of her ice-cold body gradually regaining its warmth.

—Sheltis.

—How are you right now?

Chapter 2

Are you living fine in the living sector? Do you still train your sword-play everyday, like you did two years ago? Or have you been living the life of a commoner ever since you had been exiled from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>?

"But..... What was I doing? I was actually thinking of things like these during such an important training."

She shook her head, and picked up a bunch of her dripping wet hair, then stared into the misty, shiny gold hair for a long while-

"Fufu- It feels different to shower in the day-"

A door at the end of the changing room slowly opened.

"..... This lazy voice, is it Meimel?"

She stopped her showering and turned her body. In front of her, stood a beautiful tall lady.

Her emerald green hair cascaded down past her back like a bunch of fine threads. Her grey eyes that were looking at Ymy were filled with gentleness as well.

"I am still showering."

"Ara ara- isn't that Ymy? Sorry- it seems like I have entered the wrong showering room or something—?"

Chapter 2

A woman whose slender figure was paired with a light-colored ceremonial robe - Meimel. Similar to Ymy, she is one of the five Priestesses of the floating continent.

"..... Can you please enlighten me - this is my personal-use training level, my personal-use training room, and my personal-use showering room. So how exactly did you manage to get to the wrong place?"

"Don't say it like that. As your senior Priestess, I do hope to share the troubles that my juniors are facing - isn't it better to chose a place like this where we will not be interrupted by someone else, when we are talking about your private matters?"

"Sharing my troubles?"

Upon being asked by Ymy, the senior Priestess gave a know-it-all smile,

"It seems like you are still not too used to barrier-type spells yet - your body was nearly frozen just by a mere thirty-six hours of training, right?"

"..... I have always been working hard."

"Well- actually, that is what I am most curious in."

Meimel touched her beautifully shaped chin with her fingertips, and did a pose suggesting that she was deep in thought.

"In actual battles - during the times when you were really supporting Hyouketsu Kyoukai, Ymy had actually performed really well. So why

is it only during your training, do your art of Hyouketsu Kyoukai become rough, and you burn a lot of physical energy?"

..... Ymy could not rebut.

Meimel in Carnation is the second Priestess in ranking. Being the Priestess most well-versed in barrier arts out of the five Priestesses, she could naturally see past all that in a single glance.

"The key to the barrier-type spells lies in being in a peaceful state of mind. You will have to suppress your inner feelings, and maintain a quiet state that surpass that of a plant or a rock. However, it seems like Ymy is distracted during training."

"N..... Nothing of that sort!"

Ymy shook her head in a hurry, and wiped away the face of the teenage boy from her mind.

Maybe that was really how it was. Despite it not being obvious, she did suddenly think of that boy during her training from time to time..... She was troubled by a confusing feeling.

—Sheltis, do you still remember the reason of me being a Priestess?

—It is because you had always been by my side, that I am able to hold on until now.

"In..... In any case, I am fine! In the real situations, I'll put in my all!"

"Mmm..... I guess. As of now, there had been no problems regarding your concentration during actual combat."

After shifting her white fingers away from her chin, Meimel said yet again,

"Alright, let us not talk about that. I say, Ymy. Recently-"

Upon being stared at by Meimel who was putting on a strange smile, Ymy could not help but to take a step back.

"Wh..... What?"

In actual fact, she had noticed that Meimel had been eyeing her body for quite a while now. The look from her eyes seems suspicious, or rather, lewd-

"Fufu, compared to the barrier-type spells, your development in 'that area' is much more significant-"

"..... Wait..... Wait a second, where are you looking at!"

She covered her breasts in a hurry, but the Priestess in front of her just seemed to get happier.

"What's wrong with that? Syun-rei had said that Ymy's body has been developing really fast recently, and she is rather envious about it."

"Syun-rei will not say things like that!"

Chapter 2

Ymy stopped drying her hair with her towel for a moment, and felt a sense of helplessness.

..... Sigh- She is actually a really beautiful girl, if only she will shut her mouth and stop talking.

She has a gentle and charming face, as well as a slender and well-toned body. Her powers as a Priestess is rather exceptional as well. If she were to stand there and to remain quiet, she will be an absolute beauty. Just that she will be like that, once she opens her mouth.

"Well, do you have anything else?"

"Mhmm- Syun-rei was waiting for you outside of this room. She had went back to her room, after waiting for quite a while. It seemed to be something important, so you better hurry over."

Ymy had no idea how to reply.

The Priestess in front of her does have a rather strange personality, but she has always spare a thought for others, without them knowing - just like now. However, no matter what, she should not have chosen to barge in at time when one is bathing.

"What's wrong?"

"No, nothing."

Ymy turned her head to a side, then walked into the changing room that Meimel was in. After putting on her robe in a flash, she once again turned towards the senior Priestess behind her.

Chapter 2

"See you Ymy. Well then, I shall take a shower too-"

"That's fine, but please use the shower room at your own level."

After chasing away Meimel who was about to remove her clothes, Ymy locked the door securely.

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, two hundred and eighty seventh story.

At the story close to the peak, the rooms there not only functions as the private space of Priestess Ymy,

But it is also her home as well.

She stretched out her hand in front of the door. What followed was the verification of her voice, thumbprints, pulse and visual image. After those verifications, the door opened with an mechanical exhaust sound.

"I am back, Ilis."

This is a private room specially assigned for a Priestess. The room is spacious enough to have no problem accommodating a family of four, but for Ymy who is living alone, such a huge space becomes a sort of trouble for her as well.

"Welcome back, Ymy. First, a report - about one hour eight minutes and thirty seconds ago, Syun-rei and Leon had stopped by. The two of them will be coming by again later."

Chapter 2

A mechanical female voice came from the desk in the middle of the room.

"Mmm, Meimel informed me about it. I am planning to go out again."

On the round wooden table, a crystal-machine was giving off a blue light.

"Ah, another thing. Though I know you were undergoing the barrier's training, it was still too boring for me to wait for thirty six hours. In order to kill time, I had created a report detailing Ymy's weights for the past two weeks, as well as a prediction on their trends for the next three years. Do you wish to know the outcome of the prediction?"

"..... You must be really bored."

"For this weekend, as you will be attending Meimel's tea party in the day and making muffins with Syun-rei at night, there will be a predicted increase of thirty percent in your calorie intake. Please take note."

Crystal-machine, Ilis.

It is an artificial-intelligence terminal with the appearance of a crystal. Up until two years ago, it belonged to a boy named Sheltis, and currently she is who Ymy talks to everyday.

"Then there is next week, regarding Meimel's invitation for lunch-"

"..... Let's just stop there, Ilis. I want to go to Syun-rei's room."

Chapter 2

Crystal-machine <Ilis> gave an unsatisfied voice.

"Well then, let me go along with you. Since I have nothing to do anyway."

"Fine, fine. I'll bring you along, but don't get too mouthy."

After wearing crystal-machine <Ilis> on her neck, Ymy headed towards the door yet again.

Ymy took a brief look at the empty passageway, then walked towards the junction in the middle. The whole of two hundred and eighty seventh story is shared only by Ymy and Syun-rei.

"I think, I should just head to Syun-rei's room first?"

She walked quickly towards the junction - at the turn, she passed by a guy who was carrying huge objects on his shoulders. He was in his teenage years, and had probably arrived at Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> not too long ago.

"Ah, good afternoon."

"〜〜〜〜〜〜〜!"

For some unknown reason, the guy gave a shriek upon seeing Ymy.

"Urm, good afternoon?"

"Eh..... Ah..... Good..... good afternoon!"

Chapter 2

"That looked heavy, are you alright? Do you need me to help carry it to the lift?"

"It's..... It's fine! Sorry to disturb you!"

With that, the guy grabbed onto the objects on his shoulders tightly, and dashed towards the direction of the lift.

What was left was Ymy standing there in her lonesome, with her hands about to stretch out.

"Ahh- how pitiful. That is probably a staff who have just came here not too long ago. To be called by a Priestess all of the sudden, and the Priestess had gracefully offered to help - it's not strange to find him in such a state of shock."

"..... I have no intention to scare him."

Crystal-machine <Ilis> hanging in front of her chest gave a soft wry laughter,

"The Priestesses are the representative symbols of the floating continent. It is natural for that staff to be that shocked."

"That is true considering our stands, but....."

No matter what, she still felt slightly sad, for the staff to be that afraid of her. It was not like she was planning to eat him - it was just a greeting.

Chapter 2

"Before I have became a Priestess..... Just one year ago, I was just an ordinary girl as well."

Her robe swayed with her footsteps. That is the robe bestowed to her by the Queen herself, at the Priestess' inauguration ceremony. Ymy's robe has a white base, that is matched with reddish-blue lines.

It signaled her accomplishing her lifelong dream to become a Priestess. However, at the Priestess' inauguration ceremony a year ago, that teenage boy was not around to see her in her current clothes.

"That's right. I hope that you have more self-awareness as well."

Sounds of sturdy footsteps rang from her back.

"..... Director Albert?"

"It has been a while, Priestess Ymy. I feel deeply honored that you have remembered my name."

A middle-aged man who is taller than Ymy by a head's height, was greeting her respectfully.

He is Albert, the director of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, who is in charge for maintaining and managing the place. He had worn his suit very meticulously. His already stern looks was coupled with an expression of a stare.

"I had seen everything, regarding the incident with the newcomer. I am not very pleased with that."

Chapter 2

Despite his words being quite polite, there was a tone of reproach in his voice.

"..... But, he is someone working in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, just like us."

"We have been deeply concerned about your self-awareness for a while. For a year since you have became a Priestess, I have frequently reminded you about similar things as well."

After what seemed to be a sigh, Albert knitted his eyebrows.

"The Queen and the five Priestesses who have been sustaining the floating continent. Priestess Ymy, you are one of them. Due to all of you erecting and maintaining the barrier, this floating continent has been spared from the invasion of Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>."

Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden> - the world at which the Yuugenshu resides.

It is a black territory located at ten thousand meters below the floating continent.

It is filled with pitch-black miasma and flows of black muddy waters. Regardless of the strength of light use to shine into the place, one cannot see what the interiors are like. Yuugenshu exists in a strange place like that, and have continuously tried to invade the floating continent.

"It is the Queen and the Priestesses who have frozen and barricaded that dreadful Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>. Due to that, you are

the guardian angel that sustains this floating continent, and the figure of admiration for the people here."

Ymy took the stare from the director head on.

"..... I am well aware of that. After all, I am the Priestess who was bestowed of the title by the Queen herself. I do know what my responsibilities are, and I have not once slackened on my training."

Till now, no one knows the real form behind the mysterious mist-like presence of the Yuugenshu. Under the attack of tens of thousands of Yuugenshu that came from Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>, the floating continent had came close to being destroyed several times.

It is the Queen then, possessing the strongest shinryoku, who had saved the continent from the multiple crisis.

A barrier named 'Hyouketsu Kyoukai' has successfully frozen the whole of Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>. That was something that had happened a thousand years ago. The barrier has been upheld ever since, and the spell was passed down several times, up until today. Currently, it is the Queen and her supporting five Priestesses who are in control of the barrier.

"If so, you should be more self-aware of your situation. Priestesses are the symbols of mystery and hope. You cannot come into contact with anyone as you please, just because they are the people of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. Being the guardian of the floating continent, I hope that you can maintain a certain level of prestige as well."

—Is that really so? Do I really need to maintain a certain level of prestige in order to protect the floating continent?

Ymy swallowed back those words that were about to come out of her mouth.

The Priestesses that protects the floating continent, holds a rank that is unrivaled in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, not even if the opposite person is the director of the tower. All a Priestess need to say is "Shut up", and everyone will have no choice but to obey. It was precisely so, that Ymy has always chose to endure. If she was to retort back, the man in front of her will lose all his rights of speech.

..... I do not wish to use the authority of a Priestess to shield myself.

"Actually, the reason for me being here is to discuss with you about another thing."

Perhaps that man had realized that. His stare became even sharper.

"Priestess Ymy, why have you not assigned your own personal guardian?"

"..... You are referring to my Sennenshi?"

"Yes. Not just me, but the directors of shinryoku bureau, legal-affairs bureau and mechanical bureau as well. This has been the topic of discussion among various directors during our meeting, and has been brought up multiple times. You are the only Priestess left who has not decided on a Sennenshi, whose role is to protect you from the harms of Yuugenshu. What will you do without the protection of a

Sennenshi, should there be an assault from the Yuugenshu? Should there be anything that happens to you, it will turn into a huge crisis for whole of the floating continent. You should know that better than anyone else."

The barriers created from the Priestesses' prayers - Hyouketsu Kyoukai does has its limits.

There are still the rare few Yuugenshu that can slip through the barrier that seals Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>. The people responsible with dealing with those Yuugenshu are the guards of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. Martial arts, swords, guns and heavy artillery - there are over a thousand guards specializing in various different combat techniques, and they are tasked with protecting the floating continent around the clock.

"The Priestess has the privilege to pick anyone whom she trust the most, out of all the guards in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, to be her personal guardian. I don't think I have to repeat that rule to you, right?"

"I..... I'll decide on it soon! I am just deliberating..... on who to be my Sennenshi!"

"You had said the exact same thing a month ago."

"Well....."

"It shall end here, Director."

The silver-haired young man who reminds one of sharp blades.

..... Leon.

Fair skin, together with a height that is way taller than the director's. The well toned physique was well emphasized even through his pure white coat.

"The Priestess entrust her life to her Sennenshi, in order for her to be able to focus on maintaining the barriers better. Since she is to entrust her life onto someone else, Ymy naturally wishes to consider on it carefully. That is how I feel, as a Sennenshi."

Leon Nestorius Ova - the most well-known great sword user from the whole of the floating continent. He is also a guy whom Ymy knows before they have even entered into Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

"But Sennenshi Leon. No matter what, for her to go on for a year without the protection of a Sennenshi, that is just....."

"Director. May you please consider, the reason for the personal guardians of the Priestesses to be named 'Sennenshi'."

This time, Leon's rebuttal had caused the middle-aged man to remain silent.

That was something that had happened a thousand years ago, back when the barrier sealing Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden> had still not been erected.

Upon being besieged by a huge amount of Yuugenshu, the Queen sought the oath from the last standing guard that was beside her -

those words are something that everyone from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> can recite with ease.

"..... Will you always be by my side?"

"Do not show such an uneasy expression. For that, I am willing to sing the lullaby for you. Even when you sleep, I shall be forever by your side."

"Forever..... really?"

"The lion never sleeps. If you so desire, it can be for hundreds, even thousands of years."

The huge organization tasked with the job to protect Orbie Clar - Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

The strongest five person out of the thousand guards in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, are the Sennenshi. The origin of that name is said to come from the oath between the Queen and her guard.

"I know the Director is worried about Ymy's safety. However, to a Priestess, the matter of Sennenshi is just so important. Can you give her more time to think about it, regarding the candidate for her Sennenshi?"

At one side, was the director of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, who is in charge of the whole operation of the tower. On the other side, stood

the man handpicked by a Priestess, the strongest swordsman of the floating continent.

The two of them clashed with each other heads on, despite not speaking a word.

"—Seems like the meeting is about to begin."

The person to back down by himself, was Director Albert.

"Priestess Ymy, I have to stress yet again. No matter what, please appoint your Sennenshi as quickly as possible."

The middle-aged man, whose expression had not changed since their encounter, disappeared in the direction towards the lift.

..... What a relief. Ymy pressed both of her hands on her chest, and took deep breaths to calm her body down. The few minutes of encounter had already caused huge beads of sweat to appear on her forehead.

"Thanks for your help, Leon."

"Man, I really can't see who is holding the higher position there, between the director and the Priestess."

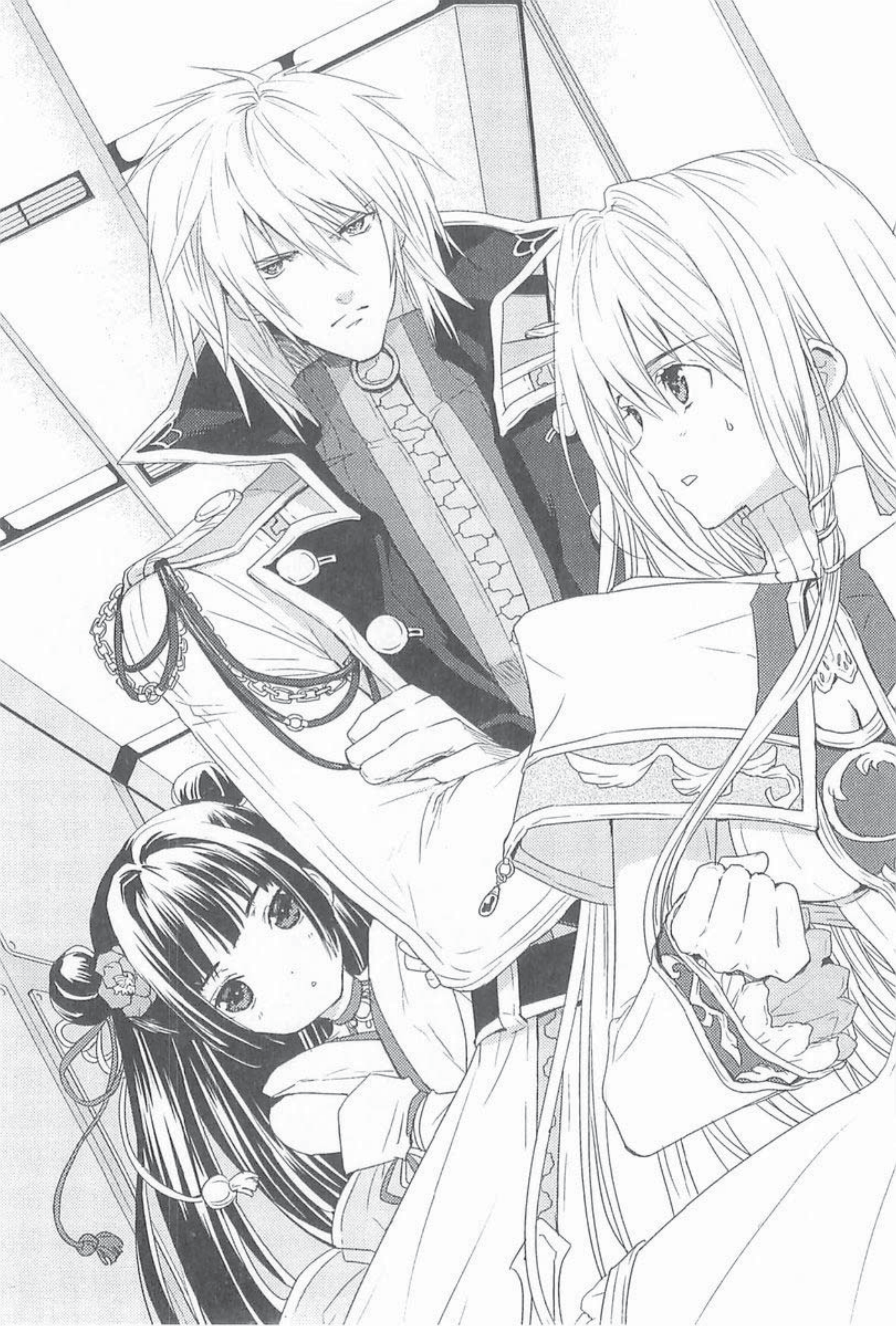
The silver-haired young man said wryly with his arms crossed.

"Alright, Syun-rei. You can come out now, everything's over already."

"..... Mmm."

Chapter 2

The black-haired girl, who was sticking tightly behind Leon, stuck her head out timidly.



Chapter 2

The buds of spring, Syun-rei. [TLNote: Her name is actually 春蕾 in Kanji. Fist Kanji is spring, second is bud. Furigana has the name as シュンレイ. A really good name, imo.]

She is a Priestess wearing a robe made of red and white cloths, with a purple sash tied at her chest. Though she is seventeen, the same as Ymy, she looks to be a year or two younger, due to her small frame, her baby face and her introvert personality.

"..... Ymy, are you alright?"

"Mmm, thanks to both of you, Syun-rei and Leon..... I would not have known what to do otherwise."

"It does seem strange to others, for a Priestess who has not chosen her Sennenshi for so long."

It was precisely as he had said. Just like how Syun-rei had chosen Leon, Ymy will have to choose a guard from the Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> to be her Sennenshi as well.

"..... I know very well, that I have to choose someone. But, whenever I think of that....."

My chest will start to hurt, and it gets difficult to breathe. Is it really fine to pick someone from the current available guards - the voice that echoes in her mind has been tormenting her endlessly.

"Are you still waiting for that person?"

"I don't know..... it hurts so much, precisely because I don't know how I myself feel."

—Sheltis. Are you really not coming back?

—Is it really fine for me to choose someone other than you as my Sennenshi?

"..... That person?"

"Ah, no. It's nothing, Syun-rei."

The only people in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> who knows about the relationship between Ymy and Sheltis is Leon. No, strictly speaking there is another person, although it is not quite accurate to use the term 'person'. It is the thing hanging in front of Ymy's chest-

"Sorry to change the topic, Leon. Seems like you had just went to Ymy's room?"

"Is that Ilis? Long time no see."

Looking at crystal-machine <Ilis> in front of Ymy's chest, Leon gave a wry smile.

"Long time no see, Leon. I've heard that you are still a training fanatic, even after promoted to be a Sennenshi."

"Well of course."

"Fufu. Syun-rei, you should be feeling really secure, to have Leon as your guardian."

"..... Mmm."

Upon seeing the teenage girl nodding her head with a blush, Leon stared at Ilis exasperatedly.

"Ilis, stop teasing Syun-rei already."

"No no, that is my heartfelt truth, you know? Going back to the point, please state your intentions in visiting Ymy."

"You are really in high spirits," Leon mumbled, while crossing his arms.

"Whatever..... Ymy, there is something that I wish to tell you. Syun-rei had sensed the presence of Yuugenshu, and it came from Park Number Four, at the south of the nature sector."

"That close?"

Ymy almost thought she had heard it wrongly. That place is located near to the Third Living Sector. The routes where children take nature hikes passes by there frequently. Many families go there for sightseeing as well.

"Well, how's the damage?"

"..... I think, there should be no damage done."

The person who replied was Syun-rei, who was standing in front of Leon. The people whom she can talk to beside Leon, are probably the four other Priestesses. Syun-rei will run away immediately if she ever sees the tower's staff.

"That..... when I arrived there with Leon, the Yuugenshu....."

Upon noticing that Syun-rei was looking at him in hesitation, Leon nodded his head.

"When we had arrived, the Yuugenshu was already defeated by an unknown person."

"How?"

"Strong traces of mateki were left on the ground, but the Yuugenshu was destroyed due to its crystal core being shattered. What was left was the remains of mateki when we reached there."

..... It can't be? Ymy covered her mouth, and looked into the ceiling.

There exists Yuugenshu of the size of a small cat, and yet with mateki strong enough to bring down a small dragon. There are also Yuugenshu big enough to swallow a whole aircraft. Even if there is only one, it is not something that a typical person from the living sector can handle with ease.

"Are there members of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> nearby? Like the apprentice-Priestesses, or shinryoku-spellcasters."

"Nope. That's what confuses me and Syun-rei. The shinryoku of a normal person should not be able to resist the mateki of the Yuugenshu."

The cursed powers of Yuugenshu - mateki.

On the other end, the power opposite to mateki, which humans possess - shinryoku.

'The power that allows miracles to penetrate throughout the world', that is how the name 'shinryoku' came about. Different uses of the energy can invoke different phenomenons. Just like a magnet, it has repulsive properties against mateki. [TLNote: I've explained the kanji of shinryoku at the end of intermission chapter]

Upon being born into the world, humans will carry shinryoku of various degrees in them. However, the power will gradually weaken if they do not consciously train it consistently.

"I too, do not think that there is someone from the living sector with shinryoku comparable to that of yours and Syun-rei."

"..... I think so as well."

The difficult training to become a Priestess, cannot be described with just the word, 'miserable', alone.

There is a very strong connection between one's shinryoku and mental strength. Similar to using boiling water to bring out the fragrance from the red tea leaves, one must force her mental conditions to the limit, before her shinryoku can blossom.

That includes praying in the blizzard, and training under burning hot conditions, where one's sweat will evaporate in an instant. Such training can carry on for days without sleep, and it was done when the girls had not yet reached the age of ten. For the past five years, only two person had managed to succeed out of the thousand of apprentices. Both Ymy and Syun-rei had endured past the training, and were standing right here.

That's right - it was all so that they can control 'Hyouketsu Kyoukai', which seals the Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>.

"Hyouketsu Kyoukai is currently maintained by the Queen, so it should be in a stable state."

The records of the past few days had shown that the activities of Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden> were of low levels - however, it was still dangerous for a Yuugenshu to be that close to the living sector.

"I understand. I'll be more careful as well."

"That's great - speaking of which, about the fact that the Yuugenshu was defeated at Park Number Four, there is only one ordinary person who can do it, that came to mind. It is the person whom you are most familiar with."

"Eh?"

An ordinary person, who I am familiar with?

Chapter 2

"Leon, could it be Sheltis that-"

Halfway through, she was interrupted by the speakers from the ceiling.

"Oi~, is Leon there?"

From the speakers mounted at the ceilings, came the voice of a girl.

"Is that Run?"

Leon retained his crossed-arms posture, and looked at the speakers above.

"Oh, there you are! I am really bored now, so lets have some training. Or else I'll get bored to death."

"How about your subordinates?"

"Mmm- they did improve recently, but it still won't do. How should I say it? It feels smashing each time I duel against you. Well then, let us meet at my training room ten minutes later, at floor two hundred and seventy four. Later!"

"Oi, oi, I am not done yet-"

The speakers became silent yet again.

"Damn Run, she's got some guts, to cut me off after saying what she wants."

Chapter 2

A dangerous smile appeared on Leon's face. Syun-rei looked at him rather timidly.

"Are you going, Leon?"

"Of course. A man can never run away from any challenge."

Leon quickly walked towards the door, before anyone could stop him.

..... He really has not changed.

Ymy chuckled while watching his back as he walked with firm steps.

He is usually calm and collected, but when he faces any sort of challenge, he will immediately turn into a stubborn young boy who hates losing. The personality of the silver-haired young man is that straightforward.

He has not changed. It has always been so ever since Sheltis, Leon and herself knew each other.

"..... Ymy, are you going?"

"Ah, I wish to watch as well. Let's go."

"Mmm- it does not hurt to take a look."

Under the persuasion of Syun-rei and crystal-machine <Ilis>, Ymy caught up with Leon as well.

***

Chapter 2

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. Two hundred and seventy fourth story.

After walking out of the elevator, what appeared before their eyes was a huge space shinning in the brilliance of copper-green light.

The copper-green light came from the shine of the metals that were exposed to light. Not just the floor, but the all the surfaces other than the side walls, the ceilings and the lighting, have been covered by thousands of heat-resistant and shock-absorbing plates.

This room was designed by the Sennenshi who owned the story, and it is specially used for training.

"Ara, Ymy is here as well-"

There was a lady sitting on the metal chair in the room. She was a Priestess with a beautiful body, and was wearing a light-colored gown.

"What's wrong, Ymy? You don't look too happy."

"..... No, I am just thinking, could this be some sort of crazy idea from Meimel."

"Fufu. The practice duel between two Sennenshi is something huge, you know? I can take this opportunity to understand my guardian better as well. Ah, come here, Syun-rei, so that we can share some snacks together-"

Meimel gestured Syun-rei enthusiastically, and placed a box full of cookies onto her knees.

"Well then- Run and Leon, all the best to both of you-"

"Oi oi, Meimel. At a time like this, shouldn't you be focused on supporting me?"

At about twenty meters away from the trio.

The teenage girl facing Leon was crossing her arms, and looking rather annoyed. That's right, that girl is the Sennenshi in charge of protecting Priestess Meimel.

"Fufu, it is a wiser option to support both sides at the same time-"

"..... Forget it, I can't win you with words anyway."

The girl who looks very tomboyish, with her yellow hair cut casually - Run. [TLNote: original is flax-seed colored hair, but.....]

Her amber eyes gave a mischievous shine, and on the whole, she reminds people of a cat. Her clothing were just a pair of white shorts, and a pure white short-sleeved jacket. Compared to Leon's bulky coat, her clothes looked considerably lighter.

"Rules?"

"Mmm, the usual - no restrictions."

Standing in front of Leon who was inquiring on the rules, Run took out a pair of gloves made of black steel.

On the other hand, Leon's right hand was grabbing on what looked like the hilt of a great sword. From its shape, it seemed to be a hilt of a double edged sword. It was unquestionably a great sword, but the all important blade was nowhere to be seen.

Suddenly, the sounds of the wind re-vibrated in the room, and Leon's hand disappeared for an instant. At the next instant, there was a change to the hilt in his hand.

It was a blade that was giving off a blue brilliance.

Azure crystals had appeared from the hilt, and turned into the shape of a blade within an instant.

It was a blade created from the azure crystals that were extracted from Hyouketsu Kyoukai.

The frozen crystals created from shinryoku are not only tougher than metal, but they are also light and flexible. Not only that, the azure ice by itself is a form of crystallized shinryoku, thus enabling it to slice away the mateki from Yuugenshu.

"..... Ilis."

Just when Ymy's eyes were hooked onto Leon's great sword, the necklace at her chest suddenly began to flash.

"Ymy, it can't be that you have forgotten the mechanics behind the appearance of the azure ice of Hyouketsu Kyoukai on Leon's hilt?"

Chapter 2

Upon being asked that question by crystal-machine <Ilis>, Ymy was temporarily shocked.

"Th-That's because..... we Priestesses know nothing about machines."

That is due to the Priestesses focusing on shinryoku. In the highly mechanized world, they are not too familiar with anything that has to do with the word 'machine'.

"The hilt in Leon's hand functions as a transporter as well. A vibrating sensor is installed in the hilt, that activates upon Leon fulfilling the criteria of swinging the hilt at supersonic speeds. What happens next is that pure azure ice will be transferred from Hyouketsu Kyoukai to the hilt, which will then be refined into the shape of a great sword."

Ilis explained it to Ymy once again after a deliberate sigh.

"Mmm- Then again, it's a really intriguing combination-"

Meimel gave her rare wry smile, while looking at the two Sennenshi.

Leon, with a robust physique, was holding onto a sword that was as long as his height in his hands.

On the other hand, the girl he was facing has a comparatively small frame. Not only that, Run had only put on a pair of black-steel gloves, and had not a single weapon in her hands.

"If I remember right, I should be leading with eight victories and seven defeats."

Run fights with her bare hands. In order to be able to come into contact with Yuugenshu that will normally destroy a human's body upon contact, Run's whole body has went through rites that engraved her body with marks, which grants her shinryoku.

"That's hard to say, since I had won twice consecutively recently. It seems like the goddess of luck is smiling on me."

"Dream on. Just you wait, I'll smack you up to the moon."

The two squabbled like children, and stepped backwards at the same time.

"Meimel, you shall give the signal to start."

"Alright~", the Priestess agreed with her mouth munching on something.

"Well, let's start when I am done with this cookie."

"Who the hell knows when that will be!"

Upon being retorted by both Run and Leon, Meimel gave a rather troubled look.

"You two are just..... Oh well, I'll just create a mock barrier."

"phia-So la telah sitra
<Begin praying by lighting up the three sided doors>"

Chapter 2

Meimel's shinryoku began activation. That was the opening verse.

With that verse sung, an azure radiance began expanding, and covered the whole chair which the Priestess was sitting on.

"Doubling the first ballad

Chanting with the barrier series - the Arts of the Princess

With an informal interpretation of Tower's Law number seven

The second Priestess has requested for the use of shinryoku"

Shinryoku comes in the form of a wave.

Similar to how the ripples spread from the point where a drop of water strikes the surface of the lake, shinryoku has the property that permeates outward with its caster at the center point. What Meimel did was to sing her chants as transmitting waves, and used it to penetrate outwards into space. As a result, the speed of spreading of shinryoku increased by leaps and bounds.

"The rites in between..... that's too troublesome, so I'll skip.

Under the guidance of the barriers, everything up until the twenty-second power of the second verse shall be repeated - alright, activate."

Chapter 2

Small dots of light tinier than snowflakes.

Just like the petals dancing in the winds, the faint lights swirled around Leon and Run, and brought about a gentle breeze. Meimel's mock barriers then expanded over an area of over a ten meters radius.

—At the same time, the two Sennenshi began their fight.

Run, with a slight smile, dashed straight at Leon.

She moved in a straight line without any excessive motion, and her speed was fast for a young girl just in her teenage years. However, in the eyes of the exceptional Leon, her speed seemed to be on the slow side.

In contrast, Leon did not even move.

The distance between the two were at ten meters..... eight meters..... seven, six..... five meters.

At then, Leon moved - just when Ymy had came to realize that from afar, he had already swung the great sword that is of the same length as his height.

The only thing seen was a flash of the azure blade, after which the howls of the wind followed.

Despite its weight being so heavy that even a grown man will have difficulty lifting it, Leon's swing of the sword still exceeded the speed of sound.

A slash that a normal person would not be able to react to, came crashing towards Run.

—*don*

In the next instant, the body of the girl vanished.

..... Vanished? Leon lifted his head. Ymy followed his line of sight.....

At the ceiling, about seven meters above his head, the female Sennenshi was standing upside down on its surface. The exceptional muscles that she was born with, together with her speed of response, had enabled Run to perform actions that are normally deemed impossible to a typical person.

Leon had landed in an unfavorable posture due to his miss. Run clenched her fists tight, and pounced onto the swordsman by kicking on the ceiling.

However, within the short time period where Run was descending from the ceiling to the ground, Leon had already positioned his blade vertically. Aiming at the girl that was approaching from above his head, he swung his great sword upwards.

"Ha!"

A slash coming from the bottom.

The reflexes of a human does not allow one to change his direction while in midair. That is common knowledge.

However, that common knowledge was easily debunked by the tanned girl. At the instance where her fist and the swords crossed path, she twisted her body in midair and avoided Leon's sword, then followed up by striking hard on the body of the sword.

Kan, the blade of the sword, which is tougher than metals, gave a dull sound under the huge force.

Predicting that Leon would not let go of his sword, Run sprang off the sword and made a somersault in the air. With the momentum generated by the spin, she aimed her heel at Leon's head - everyone could see that the attack could not be dodged.

Even so, the Sennenshi holding his sword was hardly flustered. Knowing that he would not make it if he chose to block with the blade, he swung his hilt horizontally in order to parry away the Run's incoming heels.

Zaa - piercing sounds of friction and burns was generated. Under the lights, silver sparks flew about.

"That's the first time I have seen that. Is that a new move?"

While swaying his fringes, Leon stabbed his great sword onto the ground.

Due to the impact from the hilt, Run's heels had shifted considerably from it's intended position. In the end, her drop had only managed to shave off a few strands of Leon's fringe, before she landed back onto the metal plates on the floor.

"..... Mmm - that move had worked flawlessly on my subordinates every time. It looked like there is still spaces for improvements."

Upon returning to the ground, the girl gave a troubled expression.

"It would be better if you skipped the somersault and proceed straight for a kick."

"You think so too? I have always wish perform the action of somersaulting once in the air gracefully, before proceeding with a kitty-kick. Don't you think that is much cooler?"

"That is a heel drop, rather than a cat-kick."

"Mmm, wasn't it cute?"

Leon crossed his arms, while Run looked at him and answered cheerfully.

"Well, I am satisfied with trying it once. Well then, it is about time that I get serious."

Run stopped smiling, and removed her jacket. All that is left was a sports vest.

At the same time, the atmosphere became much colder. The sparring just now was too quick for Ymy to make much out of it with her naked eyes. However, that was just warming up for two Sennenshi.

A tense feeling lingered in the static airs of the scene. Then-

"Oi, Leon. Hurry up and put on your stance. What's wrong with you?"

The girl had first noticed the abnormality in the swordsman. The silver-haired young man had been staring at the great sword in his hands, while not moving an inch.

"..... Can't do. As expected, I am not in the mood to be doing this today."

With that, the blade in Leon's hands shattered into tiny pieces. After watching the frozen azure crystals melted and vanishing into thin air, the young man turned his back towards the girl.

"Oi oi! Did you eat something wrong?"

"I have always maintained myself in the best condition."

"If so, why-"

"..... I am sorry. I just thought of a weird person all of the sudden."

Leon focused his sight onto the hilt that had just lost its blade.

"A weird person?"

"A friend who I know long ago. He was stubborn and had insisted that dual swords are much better, despite me trying to convince him into using great swords..... Simply put, he is an irreplaceable, strong sparring partner."

Chapter 2

"A strong sparring partner? How can there be any swordsman on the floating continent that can match you in terms of swords-play?"

Run scratched her head, looking all confused.

There are up to a thousand guards in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, out of which many are swordsman. However, Leon is the strongest out of all of them. The only people who are on par with Leon, are the Sennenshi, which includes Run. However, all the other Sennenshi specializes in their own weapons, and none of them wields a sword.

"Don't you always say that you can't find someone whom you can pit your swords against? Since there is no one in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> who can do so, then it is impossible for you to find anyone else from the floating continent."

"..... There is."

"Mmm? What did you say, Ymy?"

"Ah, no..... Noth..... Nothing."

With a painful expression, Ymy shook her head ever so lightly.

..... No, Run. There is really such a person.

Though he is not in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, but there is such a person on the floating continent. The person who Leon was about to name, before they had came to this training room. The only person

who lived ordinarily in the living sector, but was able to defeat a Yuugenshu-

"There is only one person."

At the front of Ymy's chest, the crystal-machine <Ilis> hanging from the necklace shone.

"A teenage boy by the name of Sheltis Magna Yehle."

"..... Ilis?"

She had wanted to cover crystal-machine <Ilis>, but it was too late.

"Ymy, what is forbidden is coming into contact with Sheltis. However, his name itself is not included into the restriction - Leon, the person who you are thinking of is him too, right?"

Leon did not answer. However, from his motionless stance, it meant that he did not deny it either.

"Oi - you two and crystal-machine <Ilis> over there, what are you guys talking about?"

"If I remember right - that name had appeared on the list of the permanently removed members of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, years ago."

Meimel crossed her arms in front of her chest, and stared into the ceiling, while deep in her thoughts.

"Run, that was something that happened before you have became a Sennenshi. Back then, Syun-rei and Ymy were still apprentice-Priestesses, while Leon was at the position of executive-guard, just one step away from rising to a Sennenshi, right-?"

"Oh- What about the details then, Ymy?"

"That....."

No words could form successfully from her parched throat. In actual fact, she had not intended to tell it to anyone. That was because her heart was in a state of mess ever since that incident.

"Ymy, I should not be the one to talk, but regardless, this is a good chance for you to openly tell everyone about it clearly. You can just treat it as a sort of information, so that as Priestesses, Meimel and Syun-rei will know about it - that there is such a unique person living on this world."

In the silence, the Priestess sitting next to Ymy gave her an uneasy look.

"..... Ymy, if you do not wish to talk about it..... you do not have to force yourself."

"No. Thank you, Syun-rei, but I think Ilis is right."

Under the gaze of Syun-rei, Ymy nodded slowly.

"..... Sheltis is my childhood friend. We two had always been close to each other, and it was rare for us to be separated. But-"

The two of them were together even during meals, or while playing. She had thought that such a thing can go on forever. However, the thing that brought about a change to all that, was a letter.

"I was shocked..... It was written on the letter, that I had been chosen to be an apprentice-Priestess."

If she was to become a real Priestess, then she will have to spend nearly all her days at Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. As it is hard for commoners to obtain permission to visit the Priestesses, she may never get to see Sheltis ever again, if she was to become one. Despite so, Ymy had a reason to be one.

"I had thought about it for days..... and finally, I had decided to tell Sheltis about it. That was because, this continent has always been under the shadows of the Yuugenshu. Even if we are to live a stable life now, we will never know when we will be attacked by Yuugenshu in the future..... If I can become a Priestess and maintain the barriers, it will mean that I am protecting Sheltis as well. That was what I thought."

She hoped that she can protect the memories between them, as well as the floating continent which had matured her, with her own hands.

That's right. Her motive for becoming a Priestess is so that she can protect the ones who are most precious to her.

"Thus, I told Sheltis about my decision to enter Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>..... Though we have always been together, but sorry. It is about time that we say goodbye."

Chapter 2

—To protect him, she had chosen to leave him.

It was inconceivable to her as well, as she could not hold back her tears. Even though it was a decision that she had finally made, after much deliberation.

However, he smiled and said to her crying self,

"This is not goodbye."

"—Sheltis?"

"Since Ymy wishes to become a Priestess to protect me, then I shall become a Sennenshi that protects Ymy. If so, we will be able to be together, right?"

"....."

"So stop crying, alright? Don't worry. I will definitely head to Ymy's side, to the peak of the tower."

"On the very day that Ymy entered into Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> as an apprentice-Priestess, Sheltis had entered into Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> as a guard as well. That was something which Sheltis told me personally."

"..... Yes."

There was someone by her side, who was working his hardest in order to protect her. Due to that sense of security, Ymy had managed to endure past the harsh training of a Priestess.

"To add on, while Ymy was enduring through the harsh training, Sheltis was working tirelessly to improve himself. Despite him not having any exceptional talents or build, he had managed to find himself a good opponent - am I right, Leon?"

"I have no comments on that."

The silver-haired young man smiled bitterly.

"Eh? So it is you?"

Run was surprised. As for Leon, he puffed up his chest, and showed a rare expression of pride.

"I'll say this first. I am leading with seven hundred and ninety three victories, against my seven hundred and ninety two defeats."

"Strange? Sheltis told me that his records are seven hundred and ninety three wins, with seven hundred and ninety two losses."

"What?"

"..... Ymy?"

Upon being asked by Syun-rei, Ymy whispered into her ears with a wry laugh,

"One of those matches ended in a draw, but both parties felt they had won."

That's right. She and Sheltis, together with Leon whom they knew later, shared a very close relationship. The three of them had always sneaked out of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> to travel about, and the three of them were reprimanded together when they were caught.

—Despite the tough training on the route to become a Priestess, everything seemed so enjoyable when the three of them were together.

"However, it is not easy for someone to be on par with Leon. I can't fathom how an exceptional person like him would be removed off the list permanently."

"Run, you are right..... and that was something that happened in summer three years ago."

It was during the time when Ymy's grades were gradually rising above the rest of her fellow apprentice-Priestesses.

Sheltis was fourteen years old, while Leon was fifteen. Three years ago, the two of them had raised themselves to the position of the executive-guards in record time - the position of the Sennenshi-reserves.

"Back then, I was about to undergo the final test to become a Priestess, while Sheltis was sent to a new danger zone. It was the outskirts of Orbie Clar, the highest frequency of occurrence of the Yuugenshu."

Chapter 2

The designated two weeks had past. Even when the third week was over, Sheltis was yet to return. Just when the uncertain Ymy was about to ask around about it, Leon appeared before her doorstep.

"..... There is something that I have to tell you."

"What's wrong, Leon? Why are you putting on such a painful expression?"

"Ymy, Sheltis will not be coming back."

"Eh? ..... Stop it, Leon..... don't joke about things like that."

"I don't believe it myself either. However, this is a report sent back by the members of Sheltis' team. Ymy, listen to me calmly. Sheltis-"

"I could not believe it, that Sheltis had fallen off the floating continent, and plunged into Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>."

The edges of the floating continent consist of cliffs and waterfalls.

One can only see the sky if he is to step off the cliffs. As such, Orbie Clar have installed walls around the edges to prevent people from falling off.

—Despite that, there are many that still fall off the edge of the floating continent.

Such as when their aircraft were assaulted by beasts, like the flying dragons. Or when they came under the attack of Yuugenshu, and so on.

The place they fall into, is the Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>, filled with poisonous miasma and mysterious black waters. If a human being is to fall into the place where Yuugenshu resides, the results are obvious..... Up till now, there has been no survivors.

"Ah, I had seen a report about that. It says that a member of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> had fallen into the Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>. Although the name of the member was not revealed."

"That's right. You can still find traces in the electronic records of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. However, the records of what happened later has been deleted from the public records of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. What happened after that was-"

Ilis said that much in reply to Run's inquiry, before falling silent again.

"..... Ymy, I think it is better if you are the one to say it."

After breathing out the remaining air in her chest, Ymy took a slow breathe.

"Sheltis is still alive."

"..... Hold on, that person named Sheltis, isn't he dead? He had fallen into the Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>, you know?"

Chapter 2

"He had returned, from Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden> back to the floating continent."

The expressions on Syun-rei, Run and Meimel froze. To have fallen into the mateki-filled Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>, and not only survive, but to return back to the floating continent as well - such a miracle could not have happened.

"It's not just Ymy. I had seen that person with my own eyes as well."

With that, Leon grabbed onto his great sword tightly.

"Initially, Ymy and I could not believe our eyes either. With his clothes in tatters, and his body suffering from fatal wounds..... but that person was unquestionably Sheltis."

He is alive. Despite being at a loss at the sudden situation, Ymy still thanked the occurrence of such a miracle. She was crying, and wanted to hug him - and that was when the real tragedy began.

Until now, Ymy still dreams about that scene occasionally.

"What I cannot believe is..... why..... why couldn't I hold onto Sheltis' hands?"

Hugging, or even the simple gesture of holding hands, are no longer possible between the two of them.

That is all due to a phenomenon that could not have happened under normal circumstances.

Chapter 2

"Mmm? What happened?"

"..... She couldn't hold his hands..... they are rejecting each other..... He had fallen into the Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>..... the energy opposite to that of shinryoku..... Ahh, could it be....."

Run knitted her eyebrows in confusion. In contrast, Syun-rei and Meimel both nodded their heads after looking at each other. Meimel then explained,

"Run, what will happen when strong forces of shinryoku and mateki comes into contact with one another?"

"Well..... Since they are two opposing energies, they should be repulsing each other. If both forces are extremely huge, then it will trigger the occurrence of the special phenomenon called 'Elbert Resonance'."

"Please stop."

"—Mmm?"

"Run..... I am sorry, but I do not wish to hear that term."

Elbert Resonance. The term which Run said, had caused Ymy to clench her teeth subconsciously.

..... I really do not wish to think of it again.

Two years ago, the pain of the taboo flames that sparked off between Sheltis and her.

"—Ehem. In any case, Run. You should have understood what had happened to Sheltis after he had fallen into the Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>, and the reason he and Ymy are repulsing each other."

"Mmm..... if that is the case, then Sheltis....."

Upon realizing the meaning behind Meimel's words, Run's expression turned somber in an instant.

"That's right. Sheltis has indeed survive after falling into Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>. However, the shinryoku of a human is gone from his body, and what has replaced it is mateki from Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>."

"The energy unique to Yuugenshu - mateki. There has not been a single case in history where a human being had came into possession of mateki. At the same time, such a situation is not allowed. Should the public come to know of it, what will happen after will only be disputes and chaos. The various bureau of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> naturally do not wish for the existence of Sheltis to be exposed as well-"

Meimel said to Ilis, her eyes shining with a knowledgeable brilliance.

"Generally, that's how it is. Of course, there were no records in regards to that."

"Fufu. But there should be another reason, for the people to be in such a state of panic? It should concern the Queen and us Priestesses, and Hyouketsu Kyoukai as well."

"As expected of Meimel. Such deep insights."

Ilis gave praise to Meimel, who seemed to be enjoying the task of unraveling the mysteries.

"The reason for the state of panic of the upper brass, was because the mateki that is inside of Sheltis is something of an unknown existence. If the mateki-bearing Sheltis is allowed to continue staying in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, there will be no one who can guarantee the safety of the Queen or the Priestesses. Neither can they ensure that Hyouketsu Kyoukai will not come under any negative influence. As such, after much discussions from the knowledgeable ones, the decision was to exile Sheltis from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. All his contributions, feats and everything about his past has been erased as well."

Ymy and Leon had voiced their opposition as well. However, as both of them had deep ties with Sheltis, they were deemed to be just shielding Sheltis, despite how much they had pleaded.

"Simply put, it had been decided that it will be best for Sheltis to be as far away from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> as possible. Though that was probably the only option available to them at that point of time, but it still leaves a bitter taste in your mouth."

Just like Meimel had said, Run was putting on a gloomy expression, as though she could not accept the truth.

"In any case, everyone, please keep this a secret."

"I am planning to do just that- but I have one final question. Isn't that right, Ymy?"

Unknowingly, the Priestess dressed in her gown had directed her sight towards Ymy. That seemingly harmless smile was mixed with a bit of a piercing glare from Meimel.

"For a year since you have became a Priestess, you have still not chosen your Sennenshi yet."

—As expected, it was about that.

Sweat was coming out of the palms of her clenched fist..... in the end, the senior Priestess had noticed that as well. She was most afraid of being accused of that, when she had talked about the matter regarding Sheltis.

"Are you still waiting? Waiting for the return of the boy named Sheltis."

First, there was silence, and then-

"..... No."

At the moment when she made that answer, her heart felt a throbbing pain that made her felt like vomiting blood.

"I am perfectly clear..... that as a Priestess, I cannot get caught up with my personal feelings. I..... I am just deliberating on who I should pick."

Chapter 2

With each and every word forced out of her mouth, the taste of blood gradually began to spread in her mouth. She understood very well what Meimel was trying to say. However- even so, it still hurts for her to be actually saying it.

"I guess. It is rather harsh, but that is the correct course of action. Should anything happens to you, the floating continent will sink into danger - you do know, that a Priestess can absolutely not die. Even if we have to sacrifice others, we will have to survive, in order to maintain Hyouketsu Kyoukai. As such, the Priestesses should never be influenced by their own personal feelings."

"..... Yes."

"Alright, I was just mimicking the words of the directors from the various bureaus of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>."

Suddenly, the look from Meimel softened down.

"I am not asking you to pick your Sennenshi immediately. After all, the Queen <Salah> has not said anything about it, right? If so, it means that she has accepted your willfulness to a certain degree."

Queen Salah. She is the lady who is holding the position as the mistress of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

She owns shinryoku of the highest purity on the floating continent, and is constantly praying in order to maintain Hyouketsu Kyoukai, which freezes the Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>. Ymy and the rest of the Priestesses are her support, and can be considered to be her apprentices.

Chapter 2

"Well then, I should get going - Ymy, you rest well too."

The Priestess gracefully stood up, gave a light smile, and left.

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Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, two hundred and eighty seventh story.

"..... I'm beat."

After changing into her pajamas, Ymy laid on the bed of her room.

"Ymy, your robe will be creased if you do not place it properly after taking it off."

The observant crystal-machine <Ilis> on the table reminded her. She fits the role of someone to chat with well enough, but the only bad point about her is that she can be rather strict.

"..... The fairies will tidy things up for me when I sleep."

"It's not the fairies, but the attendants."

—Back then, it had always been Sheltis who had helped me to tidy things up.

Ymy was in charge of cooking, while he was in charge of cleaning things, as well as washing of clothes. Due to them constantly splitting up the work that way, Ymy became poor at washing and tidying, while Sheltis was not good at cooking.

"In any case, take a rest. You are left with two days and four hours, before you have to take the stage again."

"Mmm."

The praying of the absolute barrier - Hyouketsu Kyoukai, is done at the highest story in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. Hyouketsu Kyoukai is constantly being maintained, by the prayers done in rotation between the Queen and the Priestesses. There are three days left, before it is Ymy's turn to take over from the Queen.

"There is no need to worry. It had went on rather smoothly during my mock training as well. It is the job of a Priestess to ensure that her body gets sufficient rest, in order to tune it to be at its best condition."

She buried her face into the pillow. The pillow gave off a light fragrance, which induced a comfortable drowsiness.

"You are right, it is your job to keep your body in the perfect condition..... Oh right Ymy, you can continue lying down, but just turn over for a moment."

"Why?"

After turning her body over, she faced crystal-machine <Ilis>.

"This..... this reading! Ymy, you are totally....."

"What's happening?"

"That's really scary..... According to my censors, your bust size has increased yet again? There is a saying, that a child will grow faster if she gets more sleep, but Ymy's body had developed at such a shocking pace in the short time span of just two years. I think you will kill most guys just by wearing your robe and puffing up your chest- Whoa!"

Upon being pressed on by the pillow flung at it, crystal-machine <Ilis> became silent for an instant.

"..... Ymy, it really hurts."

"Stop picking up on Meimel's way of speaking."

After returning to the position of lying downwards, Ymy brought out a spare pillow.

"Meimel is a really outstanding senior Priestess. It always seems like she is teasing you, but that is her way of showing concern towards you."

"Half of it is definitely due to Meimel's personal interest."

"If Ymy says so, then so be it."

The crystal-machine <Ilis> said with a teasing laugh.

"..... Let me ask you something, Ilis."

Ymy lifted her head from her pillow, and stared into emptiness.

Chapter 2

"I..... am I a useless Priestess?"

"That is rather sudden."

"Because..... A Priestess is someone who puts her life on the line, in order to maintain the barrier, right? I do know that. However, the person whom I wants to protect the most, is no longer around..... what should I do then?"

It was all for Sheltis. She had became a Priestess for him.

However, she could not see him during the Priestess' inauguration ceremony, and Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> no longer have a place for him either. She had heard that he was forcefully brought to the living sector, but in actual fact she has heard nothing from him ever since.

"Since you are a Priestess, you will have to contribute to the floating continent. On the other hand, the young man who you want to protect the most, is at a place that is out of your reach. The feelings of a Priestess, and the feelings of a teenage girl, have came into conflict-"

The voice of crystal-machine <Ilis> was firm, as though it was counselling her.

".....That is probably what you mean by 'being willful', right? That must be what is causing me to be unable to choose my Sennenshi, right?"

"Whether you are being willful or not, that is a rather subjective matter. But the reason for you to be unable to pick your Sennenshi, I think it must be due to the conflict that is occurring within you."

Chapter 2

The conflict within me. There will come a day, when I have to make my decision-

"Regarding that question, Ymy will have to seek for the answer yourself."

"Mmm....." She hugged the pillow tightly in her chest, in replacement of her answer.

"Alright, we have chatted way too much. Time to switch off the lights."

The lights on the ceiling gradually disappeared. The sun-like brightness slowly dimmed into darkness - after a while, the lights of thousands of stars shone on the ceiling.

The projection of the night sky. Crystal-machine <Ilis> had projected the night sky of Orbie Clar, based on its own memories. It was an endless sea of stars, glittering with the brilliance of gems. There was also the moon shining in clean bright whiteness, with its well-defined contours.

"Good night, Ymy. May you have a sweet dream."

"Good night, Ilis."

While being in a room that had a replicated the night sky on its ceilings, Ymy lightly shut her eyes.

Chapter 3: The Festival of the Stars

−The winds blowing into the streets was damp with morning dew.

The sun was still half-covered by the horizon. Red light was slowly seeping into the dark sky.

"....."

At the outdoor cafe, 'The Two Swans <Albireo>'.

At the courtyard next to the back door, a teenage boy was standing in the cold winds of the morning.

It was at a green garden encircled by three walls. The boy was focusing at the tree in the middle - hanging on a branch of the tree, was a white piece of paper hanging by a piece of thin string.

"Oi— Sheltis. You have not talked since just now. Are you ready to start—?"

"Eyri-nee, Yuto is hungry."

"....."

"Ahh, me too. I am hungry as well. I've brought some chocolates. You want some?"

"Yay— I want it!"

"....."

"Alright Sheltis, stop staring at that piece of paper already, come and have a chocolate――"

"Ahhhhhhh! I am distracted yet again! Didn't I ask you not to talk to me?"

Sheltis yelled, and turned to look at the two girls behind him.

"What are you complaining about? It's the person who is distracted that is wrong. Isn't that right, Yuto?"

"Wrong――"

".....You two are the ones who wanted to see this."

Suppressing his urge to sigh, he took a firm grip at the silver-colored metal sticks. These are the alloy batons that is legal for use under the continental laws.

He reverse-gripped the two batons, with his two arms dropping downwards in a natural position.

The next instant.

With the winds and sounds purged off at the area he was standing on, Sheltis made his move.

Chapter 3

With the girls watching, the young man's body became blurry at the instant.

And that happened just in an instant. The young man did not shift from the place he was standing on, and the batons were still hanging from his hands. However, beneath his feet, a small pit appeared on the ground where Sheltis' right foot came into contact with. The sands and grass rustled into a swirl.

It was as though something had past by at an extremely high speed.

"..... Huh?"

"There, saw it clearly?"

He turned back to see Eyriey, who was at a loss for words.

The rectangular white paper that was hanging by the string, had been cut into two pieces neatly. A gentle gust of wind blew the bottom half of it to the roots of the tree.

"Ohhh..... How should I put it?"

Eryiey was still focusing on the ends of the string, and the remaining piece of paper was hanging from.

Despite being cut off at the dead center, the remaining upper portion of the paper did not move an inch. There wasn't even the slightest vibration to be seen on the thin string.

Chapter 3

—There wasn't even a trace of any wind. His single move had achieved absolute silence.

"This..... is that even possible, physically?"

"Eyriey, not there. Look here, here's the place where you should focus on."

He waved at the girl that was standing quite far away from him.

"Mmm?"

"Not the paper. Take a close look at the string."

He lightly flicked at the string that was supporting the paper beneath it.

..... *Zaa*

The string, with a thickness of only the size of a pencil tip, was split into two vertically downwards..... the split gradually extended downwards, and finally, even the remaining half of the paper was sliced into two as well.

"Eh..... How..... How is that possible? Is it magic?"

"Urm- I just slice at it like I normally do."

The baton at his left hand was drawn out like he was pulling out a blade from its sheath, and made the initial slice horizontally at the center.

At the same time, his right hand was reverse gripping the second baton. Swinging it upwards, he sliced the top half of the paper, together with the thin string..... Then again, as his actions were way too fast, Eyriey could not make sense of what exactly had happened.

"Mmm- I still don't get it. The baton has a round end, so how did you manage to slice up the paper and the string that beautifully? Sheltis, let me take a look at that."

Holding onto the two batons, Eyriey carefully inspected their ends.

Due to it being a weapon for self-defense, the baton was designed with an arced tip. The baton itself was made of light-weight alloy, and thus do not have much weight by itself. One will probably end up mashing the paper if they use it to slice paper.

"I did it by scrapping past it. The tip of the baton was used to brush past the surface of the paper."

"..... Ugh, if I had known earlier, I would have recorded it down."

Eyriey puffed up her cheeks and crossed her arms in dissatisfaction. Ignoring her reaction, Sheltis once again looked at the string that was tied to the tree branch.

"But Eyriey, to a guard from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, this is not a big deal."

Chapter 3

Only after one has survived through the hellish training and acquired extraordinary skills, can he consider himself to be on the starting line. If not, he will not be able to fight against Yuugenshu.

"You are joking, right? To me, that is already pretty sick..... That is just something minor?"

"That's right. Especially for the guards that are chosen to be Sennenshi, their skills are even more shocking. If it was Leon, he could have sliced it with his great sword, and not miss a single time, even with his eyes closed."

..... Perhaps, that was what one calls a 'window period'.

Even after he has moved to the living sector, Sheltis has never forgotten about his own personal training. However, at the instance where he was swinging the batons, he could clearly feel that his body has became dull, and he had nearly forgotten the feeling of slicing through air. It is natural for his body not to be in its best condition since he was far away from the battles, but he still felt worried-

".....Eh?"

Sheltis blinked, and looked at the baton in Eyriey's hands.

—Then again, why do I have such a sense of crisis?

The current him is just an ordinary person who is living in the living sector. He has no need to enter the battlefield, nor does he need to train on his swords play. So even if his techniques were to deteriorate, there should be no need for him to be worried. However, after moving

into the living sector, he has been using the batons as swords to train, before he had even realized it. He was always worried about his skills deteriorating.....

"Oh right, Sheltis."

"Mmm?"

He turned back momentarily upon hearing Eyriey's voice.

"Speaking of which, Sheltis used to wield swords back at Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, right?"

"Yeah, but why?"

She immediately revealed an expression of incomprehension when she heard that.

"That's because Sheltis looks rather skinny, and you don't seem like you have much strength. It is hard for me to imagine you holding onto a great sword and swinging it about."

"..... You have hit the place where it hurts."

"So then? What is it in reality?"

"A great sword is way too heavy, so I can only use dual swords instead. Similar to the batons that I am using, except that it is thinner and lighter. Generally, I hold one sword normally, and another by reverse grip. It depends on my mood."

Suddenly, there was a tug at the edge of his short jacket. He turned back to take a glance, and saw Yuto looking at him in anticipation.

"..... Do you want a ride, or do you want me to piggy-back you?"

"A ride!"

"Alright. Well then, does Eyriey finally believe in me now?"

After placing Yuto on his shoulders, he directed the question to Eyriey.

"After seeing those things just now..... I'll believe you for now that you know a Priestess from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. However, to be honest, there are still some things which I am still half in doubt."

"Things about me?"

Eyriey shook her head quickly.

"Not about Sheltis, but the mateki that exist within you. That is the only possible explanation for you being able to fight head on against Yuugenshu with your bare fists, and coming out unscathed. But....."

"Initially, Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> was dumbfounded by that as well. They had thought that it is something that is not possible."

It has been three years since he had fallen into Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>, while it was two years since he had returned to the floating continent. He has nearly no memories of the period of time

where he was in that cursed world - obviously, one whole year had passed before he managed to return back.

How exactly did mateki get into his body during that time? Until now, there has been no answer to that question.

"About the mateki, will you be conscious of its existence in normal times?"

"Totally not."

This time, it was Sheltis who shook his head. The body which is infected with mateki, is no different from his normal one. There were no anomalies found under the rigor checks by Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> as well.

"I guess - since it is unlike those of Yuugenshu, which gives off purple mist. Which means to say, even though you are the carrier of mateki, but under normal circumstances, it will be hidden in your body."

"Ah, that is not quite right. It is kind of like static electricity."

"What do you mean?"

"Though it is not in the form of mist that can be seen by the naked eyes, the mateki in my body will still radiate outwards. Due to that, once I come into contact with a Priestess giving off shinryoku, there will be a repulsive reaction."

"Wai.....Wait! Which means to say, that we will be infected by mateki once we come into contact with you?"

"That can't be considered as coming into direct contact with mateki, I think?"

"Oh, sorry, but I have an urgent matter all of the sudden - Yuto, run away quickly! We ordinary mortals will die once we come into contact with mateki!"

"..... If that is really the case, I would not have been able to live in the living sector."

He walked to the trunk of the tree, while carrying Yuto on his shoulders.

He caught a leaf that was slowly falling down in mid air. It should have rapidly decayed upon coming into contact with Yuugenshu's mateki, but despite touching Sheltis, its emerald green color still remained.

"Ohh! Then again, why is Sheltis' mateki safe?"

"I have no idea. Why is that so?"

Once again, he looked at the leaf in his hand. There was still no change to it.

"Were there any experiments conducted on your mateki, back when you were still in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>?"

"Yes. Like shutting me in a huge machine and exposing me to huge doses of shinryoku, and locking me in a room and monitoring me via

close-circuits television for a few days straight..... I was no different from a lab rat."

However, even with the countless tests, they still could not unlock the secrets to the mateki in his body.

"In the end, they could only come up with two conclusions. One is that my mateki will not bring about a negative effect even if I come into normal people like Eyriey. The other, is when the person in question possesses overwhelming amount of shinryoku, like the Priestesses or the Queen, a repulsion will occur."

"Mmm, so that is why you can't stay at Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, but you can live in the living sector. I guess it is not all rain and no shine."

"However, I think I may be still under surveillance. I've mentioned it yesterday as well, when I was exiled from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, I've briefly heard the term 'surveillance' being mentioned."

"Whoa..... can it be that our conversation is being tapped as well?"

"Hard to say. At the very least, it does not feel like we are currently under surveillance. Moreover, this may be a farce by them, in order to keep me in check."

He had told Eyriey briefly about his situation the previous night. As she had personally witnessed him being unscathed after coming into direct contact with mateki, rather than to stay quiet and let Eyriey make wild guesses, he had decided it is easier if he was to take the initiative and come clean with her.

"A question. You have never once seen the Priestess-sama after that?"

"You are referring to Ymy?"

"Mmm. Since two years ago after you were exiled from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, you two has not even met each other once? How about exchanging letters?"

"Just like I had said yesterday, they has released an order later, that no one from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> is to come into contact me in anyway..... Then again, how surprising, for Eyriey to be using a term that is full of respect, like 'Priestess-sama'."

In the two years where he has worked with Eyriey together at 'The Two Swans <Albireo>', he had hardly seen Eyriey using honorifics to anyone.

"Eh - that is because they have protected the floating continent. It is due to their hard work, that I am able to focus on my research in machines. That is something that I can't be forgetting."

"You better not say these things while you are talking to her. Or else she will probably find a hole to bury into or something."

If the actual person was around, her face would probably be flushed red. But while she was feeling embarrassed, she would probably feel really happy from the bottom of her heart as well.

"Oh right. The Priestess-sama whose name is Ymy, she is older than me by a year right? What sort of person is she?"

Eyriey asked excitedly. Sheltis stared at the sky for quite a while after being asked that.

"What sort of person..... she's just a really ordinary girl. Though she makes a mess at cleaning and tidying."

"Eh— I am really curious about this. Is Sheltis really just in a childhood-friends relationship with that Priestess-sama? Or do you two actually share a much closer relationship than that?"

"Ah, it's time for work."

"Wait! Stop trying to end the topic!"

With his shirt being tugged by Eyriey, Sheltis turned around rather unwillingly.

"Nothing that you are expecting. We are just your normal childhood friends. Moreover, I am currently just your average commoner, while she is a Priestess. Regardless of the place we live in or our standing, we are worlds apart from each other."

..... I must convince myself with that.

Two years ago, Ymy was still one of the many apprentice-Priestesses, but now she is one of the Priestess that maintains Hyouketsu Kyoukai. She has turned into one of the people who is absolutely essential to the floating continent. On the other hand, he himself is just an ordinary person living in living sector, who will not be granted the permission to see her even if he wanted to.

"For me..... as long as Ymy stays safe and sound, I am happy."

"But- that Priestess-sama named Ymy, she has not assign her own Sennenshi yet, right? Doesn't that mean that she is waiting for someone?"

Eyriey pressed on. Her intentions were good, but Sheltis had no option other than to smile bitterly.

"No. I force myself not to think about things like this. I'll waste a day if I think too much about such things."

Perhaps it was purely due to the fact that there is no suitable candidates around. Either way, as someone who can only live in the living sector, things like these are just way out of my reach.

"..... Whatever. Since this is what Sheltis has decided, then I'll not talk too much about it."

She shrugged her shoulders and sighed, then raised both of her arms up high suddenly in the next instant.

"Alright! Well, in order to cheer Sheltis up, let us make use of the Stars Festival to enjoy ourselves as much as we can! We'll eat and play a lot!"

"..... Eh?"

"Ah! But it seems like the person in question is not too thrilled about it."

Chapter 3

"My pay for the month is dried up, after buying that top quality meat."

In actual fact, he had planned to survive on water alone, until the day his next paycheck arrives.

"Don't worry, I've checked. One can get free coupons just by helping out in decorating the streets. With that, we can eat and play as much as we like on the very day!"

"Oh- So there is such a thing..... Wait, who will be in charge of getting those coupons?"

"Do you even need to ask?"

Eyriey smiled.

"I'll think of ways to get my own coupons, so you shall be in charge of getting yours and Yuto's, alright?"

***

The streets next to the plaza were filled with flags, that had pictures of moons and stars drawn onto them.

One could see countless colorful balloons floating in the sky. The adults were setting up the stalls, while the children were picking up trash on the streets.

"It seems like everyone is busy with the preparations for the Stars Festival."

Chapter 3

On the roof of the outdoor cafe, 'The Two Swans <Albireo>'-

Sheltis looked downwards at the street, while grabbing onto a bundle of ropes and flags used for decorative purposes.

The streets are already bustling during the normal days. Right now, the temporary stage has already been set up in the plaza for the festival's use, while arching gates has been constructed along the streets.

"Hadn't I said so already? This is a once in a year festival."

Eyriey was at the roof of 'The Two Swans <Albireo>' as well. She was inflating up the balloons with a pump. They will be released into the air during the festival.

"I happened to be working last year, so this may be my very first time attending the Stars Festival."

"Eh? What about the times when you were at Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>?"

"I had been busy, since I was tasked to guard the place. Since-"

Sheltis stopped his work momentarily, and pointed to the direction of the white tower.

"There is not much chance for the Queen to leave the tower."

Chapter 3

Stars Festival - the festival with the longest history on the floating continent. It is to be held the day after tomorrow, which coincides with the time when the Queen hands over control of Hyouketsu Kyoukai to the Priestesses.

"Oh right, has Sheltis ever seen Queen-sama before?"

"I've just talked to her once. During the time when I was taking the test to be a cadre-guard."

"How is she?"

"Hard to describe. She is covered in a shawl from head to toe, even her face..... However, she is a really amazing person. One of the reason that Ymy wants to be a Priestess, is because she aspires to be someone like her."

Queen Salah holds the highest position in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, and is deemed as the one possessing the strongest shinryoku in the whole of the floating continent. The Priestesses that aids her do hold high positions as well, but the Queen is at a level above them all.

For the Priestesses, the task of maintaining the absolute barrier - Hyouketsu Kyoukai, is just something over a three days period. However, the Queen maintains it for a cubic amount of days, which is twenty-seven days.

"If I remember right, she is Salah-sama, right? There are rumors that she is the most impressive person ever in history."

"Mmm."

Chapter 3

The Queen holds Hyouketsu Kyoukai for twenty-seven days, while the Priestesses take over for three days. In Orbie Clar, thirty days equate to a month, while twelve months makes a year.

In the twenty-seven days, the Queen will have to pray continuously, without sleep or rest. The only time where she is relieved of all that, is during the three days where the Priestesses take over. In order to show their gratitude and respect for the Queen, the Stars Festival, which is held once per year, will take place during the three days resting period.

"Come to think of it, why am I the only one who is working, since some time ago?"

Sheltis' job was to decorate the houses in the area. He had been leaping between the roofs of the various buildings to put on the decorations, which was rather tiring.

"My job is already done. Here, look, there are no more balloons in the box."

..... Really.

One can get free coupons for helping out with the festival. Sheltis was originally thinking of how to obtain coupons for both Yuto and himself, and in the end he had no choice but to do the job load for two person.

"Well, with that, I am done..... Alright, I've successfully cleared the job for today."

"It's been hard on you. Let us head back down then. The view here is nice, but the winds are slightly too strong."

Eyriey was walking towards the ladder with the pump in her hand, when Sheltis called out.

"Ah, hold on a second. I remember Eyriey has a computer, right?"

"Mmm, and?"

"There is something that I hope you can help out with."

Upon hearing that, she gave a sinister smile.

"Oh-? Are you thinking of something that is up to no good?"

"How do you know?"

"Simple. Because Sheltis will normally not beat around the bush."

"Mmm, you are right- Ah..... Wait."

Just when he was about to nod his head, Sheltis stopped moving subconsciously.

"What's wrong?"

"No, I am thinking..... never mind, forget it."

"What the- I am even more curious now, since you have said things like that. Stop thinking too much and just shoot. I will be the one to decide if I can do it or not."

Eyriey said angrily.

"Mmm..... Well, here I go."

Despite having no one else on the roof, Sheltis still lowered his voice.

"—Are you able to hack into the central computers of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>?"

At that instance, the expressions on Eyriey's face had disappeared.

She crossed her arms and looked into the distance, while muttering to herself. What she was muttering were high-leveled equations and proofs.

That is a habit of the girl. Whenever she is thinking of something, she will flood her brain with mathematical equations, in order to pressure her mind.

"I'll say this first. This is an illegal act, no matter how you see it."

Having finished reciting the mathematical formulas, Eyriey reverted back to her normal expression.

"Because I need some data."

"Come again?"

"I need the records of the appearances of Yuugenshu that Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> is holding. The list that details when and where Yuugenshu are sighted at. If possible, please compile the monthly reports into a year, and I need the records for at least ten years."

"Huh, that simple?"

"..... Eh?"

Upon hearing how simple Eyriey made it sound to be, Sheltis could not help but to doubt his own ears.

"Mmm? What's wrong with you?"

"No..... is it really okay? I'll make it clear, those data are of second-class security."

"Mmm, in any case, I'll try to help you find it."

..... Does she really understand what I am asking for?

To hack into the main computers of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. Even as someone who is not well versed in the areas of information technology, he could easily imagine how difficult the task will be.

"Uhhhh..... For you to agree that easily, it just makes me feel uneasy..... Is Eyriey just an ordinary girl? Can it be that you are actually some sort of spy for some secret agency?"

"Nope. Even though I have not tried it before, I don't think there will be much of a problem. Come to think of it, this is actually quite interesting."

What is interesting?

Before he managed to come up with an answer, the teenage girl shrugged her shoulders and gave a wry smile.

"Sheltis has actually wanted to obtain information on Yuugenshu from the main computers of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. That's no different from the guards from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>."

"..... Eh? Is that so?"

"You are not even aware of it yourself?"

Eyriey's expressions became complex.

"Sheltis, you had said it to me before: 'If I am to be involved with things related to Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, I'll be causing trouble for Ymy, who is a Priestess. As such, I will have to live on in the living sector as an ordinary person'. Right?"

"Mmm..... To think I had already experienced it myself two years ago."

For someone who is a carrier of mateki, his existence is on the opposite ends with Ymy, who is a Priestess. For him, the only thing he could do now is to care about Ymy from a place far away.

"However, aren't you getting involved with Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>'s matters, by wanting to illegally hack into their main computers? Most people will not be doing that. The reason for your hesitation is due to that, right?"

"..... Don't go about guessing randomly. I am just concerned about the information on Yuugenshu, due to us having encountered them recently."

"Well, I am just asking casually. You don't have to answer if you don't want to."

A secure yet lonely expression. The two conflicting emotions were flickering between Eyriey's eyes.

"It's enjoyable to be with Sheltis - that is good enough for me. I think Yuto thinks the same as well. However, you really do not wish to return back to Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>? In actual fact, you must have been worried about Priestess-sama, right?"

"..... That's quite a difficult question to answer."

He did not know if he was smiling and crying at the same time, when he said that.

When being asked if he is worried about Ymy, the answer is a definite yes. That was because, he had yearned to become her Sennenshi more than anyone else. However, two years ago, he had experienced it personally, and realized that it is a wish that can no longer come true.

"Even without me around..... Ymy will still be a competent Priestess."

"Forget it. Since you have put it that way, I will feel sorry if I am to retort any further."

"In..... In any case, I'll leave the matter about the data in your hands."

"Alright. However, don't you think you will need to prepare some sort of reward?"

Eyriey's sight went downwards - to the signboard of 'The Two Swans <Albireo>'.

"I am originally in charge of buying the ingredients needed for tomorrow. As you know, I am a night owl, so it will be tough for me to wake up early in the morning."

Outdoor cafe 'The Two Swans <Albireo>'.

As the front door was not opened, Sheltis entered into the kitchen via the back door.

"I'm back. Good morning."

"Welcome back, Sheltis. Morning."

Chef turned away from the pot to look at Sheltis.

"I have helped Eyriey to purchase the ingredients. Not sure if I get everything right."

He placed the towering ingredients that he was hugging in his chest down onto the table.

"Let me see. Peransa-grass, Garagara-fish, petrified-mushrooms..... Perfect, everything's there."

After arranging the strange ingredients in a straight line, Chef clasped her hands in satisfaction.

"A new combination again?"

"You mean new dishes. Interrogation-tortured Garagara-fish, and Stubborn Salad with Peransa-grass and petrified-mushrooms."

Despite the unappetizing names, Sheltis could not understand why they are always popular with the customers.

"Chef, such things are usually not used as ingredients right..... nearly all of them are poisonous."

"Ara, Sheltis does have quite a bit of knowledge. However, as long as they are cooked properly, they will be very delicious..... and they are cheap too."

"That last line is probably what matters to you the most!"

"Fufu, that's a secret."

"I understand. I heard nothing. I shall go back to sleep."

He left the kitchen and walked towards the staff's corridor. Since the market opens in the wee hours, plus the fact that he had been working on the night shift, he had barely gotten any sleep.

"Ah, Sheltis, Eyriey's been looking for you. She asked you to stop by her room for a while when you return."

Chef's voice suddenly came from the kitchen at his back.

"Eyriey's looking for me?"

The first thing that came to his mind was the thing he talked about yesterday.

"So in the end, it is still difficult huh....."

Not only is it difficult to hack into the main computers of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, there is the danger of being arrested if they discover any traces left behind. Though Eyriey agreed readily, it would not be strange for her to change her mind within the night.

"Eyriey, can I enter?"

"Go ahead-"

From the other side of the door, came the relaxed voice of Eyriey.

"Well then, I'll be entering..... Whoa! What..... What's this?"

At the instant he opened the door, stacks of papers came crashing down. He barely managed to maintain the balance of the stacks of

papers that were about to fall on his head, by pressing them down with his hands.

Before his eyes was a stunning scene.

There were probably hundreds..... no, thousands of printed papers. They were stacked together pieces by pieces, and the tower of papers had even exceeded the heights of adults. Multiple towers were clustered together in several groups. The originally huge computer and its cables took up a huge portion of the room, and thus there was no longer any room for one to stand on.

"Be careful. I've printed these out in sequence."

Behind the forest of the paper towers, was Eyriey sitting on a chair with her back facing him. She was looking at the screen and tapping on the keyboard with amazing speed.

"..... What's with this?"

"I am already done with the stuff that Sheltis had requested me to do yesterday. Didn't you want the data from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>?"

She continued on typing without turning her head backwards.

"....."

"What?"

"No, nothing."

—Seems like I have worried too much.

Sheltis gave a wry smile at the girl who was concentrating on the screen.

"Well, are you really ready with hacking into their system? That's great. I do hope it will be done as soon as possible too."

"Mmm, no no."

"No?"

"What I meant is, I have already finished hacking. These printed papers are the data. They are printed on both sides, and there are a total of thirty-nine thousand six hundred and three pieces."

"Ugh, which means to say....."

After being stunned for a full ten seconds, Sheltis finally shouted,

"It can't be?"

"What can't be?"

"No..... It just feels impossible for you to complete it, since I've only requested you to do it yesterday. Or should I say, that I myself is half in doubt..... How did you hack into their system?"

There are no direct connection between the computers in the living sector and the main computers of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. To hack in, one will first have to tap into Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>'s reception

terminals, before cracking into the control tower's terminals, main system, followed by Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>'s integrated system.

However, all of them are independent systems. Not to mention, a firewall named 'Sanctuary Class' exists after the stages of the main system.

"Mmm- in principle, I took it heads on. Actually, up till the main system, you have that thing to give thanks to."

She pointed to the computer next to the screen.

"First, I picked a pay-to-use terminal at the cafe in the living sector, and tweaked it so that I can control it remotely. Next, I launched a series of intensive assaults with its amazing processing speed. While the initial system was overheating due to intercepting my attacks, I slipped a pre-written trojan into their systems. Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>'s integrated system and their main computers had something called 'Daibo Shinsuu' which is rather tough to crack, but I've managed to crack it after a series of tough battles. That's how it is." [TLNote: the 'Daibo Shinsuu' is actually 大母真数, but it does not really make sense to me, so I've just slipped in its pronunciation.]

Eyriey finally turned herself to face Sheltis, by giving a push to the rotating chair, which gave off a weird sound.

"I've downloaded the information straight after, and sent them over to four auxiliary-processors. However, I do not know when they will do a remote edit or delete. As such, I've chose to print them out physically, and they are the stuff that Sheltis sees before you."

"..... I'll try my best to look through everything."

"Well, that's fine with me, but there are just too many unnecessary information sandwiched in between. Thus, what I am doing now is-"

She lifted her finger, and touched the button on the screen.

At the same time, a printer by the side began to work. After a series of mechanical sounds, it threw out a single piece of paper.

"Take this. You have to thank me properly for it."

The craftily smiling girl was pinching on the printed paper.

"I had converted all the raw information into data, then sent them for processing, before detailing them onto the map of Orbie Clar. Simply put, all the information in these piles of paper have been condensed into that single sheet of paper."

"Eyriey..... For the first time ever, I think you are absolutely amazing!"

Sheltis blinked his eyes, and stared blankly at the piece of paper that he had received.

Chapter 3

"The robots that you have made has always went out of control; the homemade rocket launcher that you used to kill cockroaches had wrecked half of the cafe; the automatic dishwasher which you repaired had broken all the plates due to the immense water pressure, and so on..... I have originally thought that you are just a troublesome girl who is good at inventing stuff that will ultimately fail..... Eyriey, how much you have grown!"

"Hmph, now you are finally looking at me in a different light huh?"

Eyriey said proudly with her arms crossed, while still sitting on the chair.

"That's right, human beings are a species that is constantly evolving. I have already left the failures and sufferings of the past, and is moving into the mechanized future at maximum speed-"

At the back of the girl who was speaking endlessly-

A *beep* sound rang.

"Maximum speed..... Eh.....?"

The screens turned pitch black for an instant. White text then began to pour down from the top of the screen. That continued on for tens of seconds, before another *beep* followed. This time, the screen turned totally white.

"Format complete."

Chapter 3

"Ah..... Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh—! The..... The data which took me great pain to obtain, they are all gone!"

The teenage girl cried out loud in front of the screen.

"..... Fu..... Fufu..... If one does not key in a certain command within a specific time-frame, the data will be formatted along with the computer huh? I really did not think that such a sinister trap will be implemented on their secret data..... I've been had."

"That's more like the Eyriey who I know. I feel slightly more relieved now."

"What do you mean by that..... Forget it, since it has already happened. Thankfully, I had everything printed before they were wiped away. Right, Sheltis, do you find anything after looking through the data?"

"Uhhh- I've just glanced through it, without taking a close look at it."

Printed on the paper, were the places of appearances of Yuugenshu. The time and frequency of appearance were differentiated by different colors and symbols. Overlapping those things, were the defense lines of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> at the respective time, indicated by various colors as well. After putting all the information together with the map of Orbie Clar-

"Sheltis? Why did you stop speaking all of the sudden?"

"..... It does not feels right..... or rather, it seems too unnatural."

He passed the paper to Eyriey, and looked into the ceiling.

"The fact that Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>'s defenses are not perfect, has came under criticism multiple times in the past. That's because it is possible for Yuugenshu to break through the areas where the defenses are weak."

"Mhmm, everyone knows that."

"However, the Yuugenshu that bypassed the defense lines did not invade the living sector. Why is that so?"

The paper which Eyriey was holding.

It had indicated with a line, that the recent Yuugenshu breaches have all occurred close to the outskirts of the living sector. That was the first thing that Sheltis had noticed.

"Is that so? Think about it, there are barriers erected by a Priestess-sama along the living sector as well, right? By a person named Meimel, who specializes in barrier spells."

"Even so, it is not perfect. Back when I was at Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, I had battled with Yuugenshu that had infiltrated into the living sector. But according to the compiled recent data done by Eyriey, the Yuugenshu had actually got close to the living sector, and yet most of them just stuck to their positions and stopped advancing further in."

Could it be that they were afraid of Priestess Meimel's barriers?

No, her barriers are actually just there to act as a basic defense. In order to cover a huge land area, the force of the barriers cannot be maintained at a high output. Rather than preventing the invasions of the Yuugenshu, it is there to slow down their movements.

If so, why did the Yuugenshu not breaking past the barrier and assaulting the living sector, despite such a long time?

"I say, Sheltis is behaving strangely."

Eyriey cast her sight on Sheltis.

"Mmm?"

"This is the first time in two years since I have lived with you, that you have asked me to steal some data, no? Could it be that there is something that caused you to be suspicious about the movements of Yuugenshu?"

A question that is hard to answer. To put it bluntly, it was a gut feeling. However, if she wants to go into details-

"It is probably the thing that happened during the barbecue."

"When we had met the Yuugenshu?"

"Eyriey had said something like, 'why did the Yuugenshu appear near the city', right?"

Chapter 3

"Yuugenshu? It can't be..... Why does it appear at a place so close to the city!"

That will be the first thing that most people from the living sector will think of, including Eyriey. On the other hand, if it was a guard from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, he would have been relieved that the Yuugenshu has been detected before it infiltrated into the living sector.

"At that time, a question appeared in my mind. Since it had already reached the nature park next to the Third Residential Sector, why didn't the Yuugenshu follow up by attacking the humans in the living sector?"

"Wait, hold on. Wasn't we attacked by it?"

"That's what I initially thought. However, after thinking about it for the whole night, my take on it has changed. Somehow, it just feels like that Yuugenshu had no intention of attacking us."

"—Eh?"

Prior to the Yuugenshu's attack, Sheltis had seen the rotting tree among the forest of trees. They were attacked only after the Yuugenshu had left forest of trees.

"The Yuugenshu had been hiding among the trees. We were actually the ones who entered there first. In other words, we had probably provoked the Yuugenshu."

"..... And then? What are you trying to say?"

"The Yuugenshu at that time had 'something else to do', that was more important than attacking humans. Due to us closing in on it and provoking it, as a result, it attacked us. That's what I think."

Well then, the Yuugenshu that should be attacking humans, what exactly was it doing back then?

That thing is—

"Just as shown by the data, it had been loitering near the living sector, with its intentions unclear?"

"Sadly, up till now, all these are just my conjectures."

"From the way you put it..... it is as though you have a clear idea on what the Yuugenshu are up to."

"Not until that stage. It's just, based on the analysis of the data - the Yuugenshu that we saw at the nature park, as well as the recent Yuugenshu that appeared, their reason for breaking past Hyouketsu Kyoukai and into the floating continent, is not to attack humans."

"Then why did they do it?"

"It is so that they can observe the human world."

"To be more precise, they are observing the forces of human that are capable of repelling the Yuugenshu - the Queen, Priestesses, and Sennenshi. They are observing the situation and structure of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. If it is me, I'll be thinking along that line."

At that instant, the room became deadly quiet.

The only sounds to be heard was the exhaust from the computer. The girl slowly lifted her head.

"..... If that is really the case, then it is quite scary."

"That's normal. Any ordinary person will feel that way."

If his guess was real, then those mysterious beasts may be more crafty than what humans have imagined. They had no longer chose to enter by force, but instead, they picked a more reliable method of observing the floating continents.

However, the bad thing about his conjecture, was that there was not enough solid proof to substantiate.

"Mmm, if only Ilis is around, we will have someone whom we can discuss this with."

"Ilis?"

"It was something bestowed to me by the Queen, when I had risen into the cadre level of the guards - she had said, 'I shall entrust this to you'. It was an observation unit, a crystal-machine by the name of Ilis."

Observation unit - artificial intelligence that are tasked with the job observing the mateki of Yuugenshu, and relaying their positions to its holder. Due to the huge mateki-observation machines that exist within

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, there are not much observation units for individual use. Ilis was something that the Queen had bestowed to Sheltis personally.

"Are things like that rare?"

"Observation units by themselves are not rare, but Ilis is different. Not only is her specs high, but she can freely connect to any other electrical devices as well. Though she is an artificial intelligence, but her personality is closer to that of a human's."

Even then, Sheltis had only owned Ilis for a short time-span of a few months. On the day he was exiled from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> due to him falling into Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>, all the things he owned, including his dual swords, were confiscated. He has absolutely no idea who the current holder of Ilis is as well.

—Since Ilis is not around, how shall I prove the validity of my conjecture?

"Eyriey, can you hack into the computers of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> for another time?"

"The time-span between the attacks is too short. That is way too dangerous. This time round, we may be tracked down by them."

Eyriey put her arms in a symbol of 'X', to show that she was against the idea.

"This time, you just need to bypass the initial firewall. Please."

"Mmm..... Ahhh, you are hopeless. With that, I shall not owe you anything anymore."

"Owe?"

With that, the teenage girl in her overalls turned her head away rather embarrassingly.

"Didn't you save me and Yuto at the nature park?"

"That incident? It's nothing big-"

"You think that is something normal? Then you can't be anymore wrong."

With the opposite party being a step quicker in her retort, Sheltis had no choice but to close his mouth.

"It is something different if we are your relatives..... However, against such a disgusting Yuugenshu, how many people will actually put on their courage to save someone else? Especially when things were going so badly."

"..... Is that so?"

He entered into Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, with a determination to become a Sennenshi to protect Ymy. Till now, his beliefs has never wavered.

—It is his mission to fight against Yuugenshu.

"If you think that is to be expected, then I think you must have still treated yourself as someone from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>."

A smile appeared on Eyriey's face, though it was not clear if it was her smiling wryly, or her smiling out of sympathy at Sheltis.

"I..... am not hanging onto the past....."

"Forget it, since it does not really matter. In any case, let us get to work."

The computer in front of her lit up. The lights then extended into the terminals by both sides. Multiple screens in the room began to operate. For a while, the room was filled with the unsynchronized sounds of the machines.

"Alright - time to prepare to hack into the monitoring systems of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. Round two, here we go."

Like a child who was challenged to solve the puzzles, the teenage girl stared at the screen with intense concentration, and a smile appeared on her face.

A transparent sky-blue sphere.

In the dark blue world, the fringes were gradually dyed red in the setting sunset.

"Yet another day that is about to end....."

Chapter 3

This is one of the rooms in Orbie Clar that is closest to the sky. Ymy was sitting next to the window in her personal room, and glided her fingers past the glass.

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, two hundred and eighty seventh story.

A height that is over one thousand and nine hundred meters tall, penetrating past the clouds and into the sky - it is a place that not even birds can reach with their pair of wings.

"There is less than twelve hours to go before the Stars Festival starts. The living sector should probably be bustling by now."

Crystal-machine <Ilis>, which should originally be in energy-saving mode, spoke.

"Yeah....."

The Queen who has been maintaining Hyouketsu Kyoukai for twenty seven days is fast approaching her rest time, and Stars Festival is about to start as well. In another words, it is about time to hand over the control of Hyouketsu Kyoukai to Ymy and the other Priestesses.

There is no room for failure for the ceremony. Should Hyouketsu Kyoukai ever collapse, the whole Orbie Clar will fall under merciless assault by the Yuugenshu of Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>.

"Don't worry, there will be no problems if you follow the instructions of Meimel. Her abilities in the area regarding barrier-type shinryoku spells are unquestionable."

"I have never once doubted her, you know."

Meimel is the most experienced in terms of barrier spells, while Syun-rei is the youngest and most talented Priestess.

Personally, Ymy was not too worried about the arts of Hyouketsu Kyoukai either. She had worked hard on her way to become a Priestess, and after becoming one, she has constantly studied on it.

"But please be careful. I have a bad premonition."

"Premonition?"

For a machine, the term 'prediction' should suit it better. However, Ilis always prefers to talk in a human-like manner.

"The Yuugenshu seems to be at unrest. It looks like they might be up to something bad."

—Eh?

Ymy was confused. The Yuugenshu that attacks the floating continent has always been a source of danger. As such, it seemed strange for Ilis to use the term 'unrest'.

"Before I explain. Ymy, do you know that someone had illegally hacked into Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>'s computers this morning?"

"Nope, I've only come to heard of it now."

"I guess, since I had helped the opposite party as well. There should have been no one who has realized it."

"I see, if so, then it is really..... Eh?"

She hurriedly walked towards the table, and roughly grabbed crystal-machine <Ilis>.

"Ilis! What's the meaning of that?"

"Simply put, I was quite curious about the intentions of the hacker. Judging from the methods of hacking, it was obvious that the person is someone who possess machines with high specs, and also well versed in the relevant knowledge as well. He does not seem like those newbies who are just hacking for the sake of having fun. Thus, I really wanted to know what information of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> is that person interested in."

"Which means to say..... you gave that person free reign in his actions?"

"I was the one who had retrieved the records, so you are right to say that. However, part of the reason for me doing so is due to my respect for the hacker.

The main computers of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> are protected by encryption program named 'Daibo Shinsuu'. It looked as though the hacker was spending quite some time there, thus I helped by secretly overwriting his trojan with the decodes. On the side note, it is already an impressive feat for that person to have hacked till that stage."

Ilis said tirelessly. However, for a machine dummy like Ymy, it was quite commendable for her to be able to understand about roughly half the contents. The only conclusion that she could make is—

"This..... so, it means that Ilis is really good as well.....?"

"It is my honor to receive your praise. Alright, next is the important part. Having received my help unknowingly, do you know what was the hacker aiming for?"

..... How should I know?

She could barely make out the contents, much less come up with an answer.

"Don't be shocked. It concerns the female employees of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> - it's their three sizes and underwear-"

"Ilis? I am actually listening to you very seriously, you know?"

Her grip on crystal-machine <Ilis> tightened.

"Ymy, it hurts it hurts..... the joke shall end here..... ahem, actually, it is the data on the appearances of Yuugenshu."

"Could it be someone from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>? Typical people should not be interested in things like these."

"I thought so too back then. But not long ago, an interesting message has popped up on the public terminal systems of Tenketsu Palace

<Sophia>, and it was sent anonymously. The hacking had occurred at about over ten hours ago, and it read-"

"Warning - there is abnormalities in the behaviors of the Yuugenshu."

"..... It happened at only more than ten hours ago, meaning that not even a day has passed yet. Is it really something that has happened not long ago?"

Considering that Ilis was explaining in such detail, could it be-

"That's right. There is a very high possibility that the hacker back in the early morning is the same person as the anonymous sender of the mail."

It was hard to imagine it as a normal staff from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. Well then, could it be the guards of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>? No, rather than doing all that, it would be easier to just report it to Sennenshi Leon or Run - there was absolutely no need to post it anonymously on the public terminals..... If so, who could it be?

"Then it is someone from the living sector?"

"I think so too. He is definitely not your ordinary person though. Since he had made a warning about the abnormalities in the behaviours of Yuugenshu, he must be someone who is well versed about Yuugenshu."

A person from the living sector.

And well versed in Yuugenshu—?

"..... Oh. Speaking of which, is there some truth in the warning?"

Ymy asked casually. The crystal-machine <Ilis> on the table went silent.

"Looking at the way things are now..... Upon being reminded by him, it does seems like there is room for investigation."

"What do you mean?"

"It seems like the Yuugenshu are observing the Queen and Priestesses who are maintaining Hyouketsu Kyoukai - the recent sightings of Yuugenshu are spread evenly around Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> in a circle. And they are all within a fixed area."

"Observing us.....?"

Which means to say, the Yuugenshu were closely monitoring the human's world.

"Then again, that is a phenomenon that has just happened recently. If we are to compare it against tens, even hundreds of years worth of data, then we can only explain it by calling it a coincidence. With regards to the warning, Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> will most probably just continue to monitor on things, and nothing more. As the warning has clashed with the ceremony of the Queen handing over the barrier to the Priestesses, there is really no manpower that they can spare to look into this."

The validity of the warning was unknown. Just like what Ilis had said, if one is to extend it to tens, hundreds of years, then there might be similar incidents in the past. That's right, the people of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> must have thought so. Even for Meimel, as someone who has been a Priestess for quite a while, she may probably just consider it as paranoia.

However..... if the person is the childhood friend who she knew-

"If it is Sheltis..... then what will he say?"

"Not that, surely? Don't you already know the answer?"

"I'll investigate. Ymy, wait here for my return."

He will definitely say that.

..... Why did things turned out to be like this?

If that young man..... if he is the Sennenshi protecting her, then even if she was to encounter an inexplicable happening like this, she would definitely not feel uneasy about it.

"Ymy, regarding Sheltis-"

"I know, I should be concentrating on the things related to Hyouketsu Kyoukai, right?"

Chapter 3

Emptying the swirling thoughts in her mind, Ymy once again walked to the window.

She touched the glass with her fingertips.

The hard and icy touch seeped into her burning body, and her soul seemed to calm down from that. Right now, she must fulfill her responsibilities as a Priestess.

"Alright, it's fine! I'll do my best!"

"Where are you going?"

While pointing to the ceiling, Ymy walked quickly towards the door.

"To the highest story. There is not much time left, and I wish to let my body get used to it first."

At the lift leading to the highest story of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

In front of the door of the lift, Ymy stretched out her hand.

"Confirming..... Connection to the Bureau of Shinryoku: normal..... Checking..... Waves of shinryoku: match..... Confirming.....

Confirmed to be the fifth Priestess, Ymy Ele Soufflenictole."

The two doors of the lift parted sideways. Ymy stepped into the small circular space. Upon walking right to the center of the lift, the doors closed automatically, and the lift began to move.

It continued to rise, until it reached the peak of the tower that is located deep in the skies.

Ding

The bell rang, and the lift stopped.

"..... Fu."

She took a deep breath in, and out.

"Calm your heart down. You must be calmer than the hundred years old trees that are still firmly implanted to the grounds, or the huge boulders located deep within the valleys. Your heart must be burning with belief that is stronger than anyone else, and you must hold on to a wish that is purer than anything in the world - only by fulfilling that, will you be qualified to be a Priestess."

She murmured the words that were said to her by Meimel on the very day that she had became a Priestess.

..... No problem, I can do it.

The doors of the lift opened, and Ymy took a step forward.

What followed-

Was a endless world of ice, appearing right before her very eyes.

Chapter 3

Two hundred and ninety first story of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> - the uppermost story that is named <<Paradise>>.

There is no ceiling nor walls. Just an area that seems to extend on endlessly.

—As if it is another world.

Above her head, the ceiling-less space were filled with lights of the white night. Beneath its radiance, is the scene of azure ice walls that extend endlessly. The surface of the icy walls are crystal clear, and shone brighter than any precious stones - just like a mirror reflecting the views of the world.

..... Her breathes were nearly frozen.

Any sort of cold wear is meaningless. All living things, objects and Yuugenshu - the art of shinryoku that freezes anything, and seals away their time and soul: Hyouketsu Kyoukai.

Looking ahead, is a corridor made of azure ice and mirrors.

This is the praying area of Hyouketsu Kyoukai, and it is a room that is most strongly affected by the barrier.

Even the spellcaster herself must endure such freezing coldness.

"..... I can never get used to such a temperature."

Biting on her lips that were trembling from the cold, she walked down the corridor of azure ice. The peaks of the ranges of ice

suddenly disappeared not too long after, and the blizzard accompanying them had quietened down as well.

The <<Paradise>> located at the upper most story of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> - in its center, lies a huge slab of crystalized azure ice.

A lady was sealed in the center of the transparent crystal.

One can barely see the pure white robes of the lady, who was deep inside the azure ice.

—Queen Salah.

A lady that devotes herself to the azure ice which freezes everything, and prays for Hyouketsu Kyoukai alone. Due to her constantly staying in this room for nearly the whole year, and also the fact that her face is always covered with a veil - even Ymy has never seen her real appearance before.

..... The person who I yearn to be.

A woman who can pray endlessly for many days consecutively without sleep or rest, despite being in the barrier that freezes right down to the bone.

She cannot be compared to the Queen, who is just too far away from her grasp.

The chills one will experience exceeds that of pain, and it will gradually becomes a giddy and nauseous feeling. Initially, when Ymy

first stepped into the room as an apprentice-Priestess, she could barely hold for a few minutes.

The Priestesses must maintain Hyouketsu Kyoukai for three days after taking over from the Queen. If they work harder, they can perhaps maintain it for a little longer. However, what exactly must be done, in order for one to maintain it alone for a period of nearly a month? And in such an icy cold room that will pushes one to the boundaries of insanity.

"..... Why exactly are you working so hard for?"

The huge azure crystal.

This question will never reach the ears of the Queen, since she was sealed deep within the bulky ice.

Ymy listened carefully to the melody that flows through the story, as though she was waiting for an answer.

The world of ice that freezes the flow of air, the movement of the atoms, and even time. In such a tranquil space, flows a tone that is gentler than any existing melody-

Yu/ Uhw =C r-sanc uc Eden
<Under the foils of the slumbering Eden>

term-l-pile xel, xin, ole fusen elchel
<The falling stars, time and dreams covered the eyes and faces>

Chapter 3

That was the song of prayers that maintains Hyouketsu Kyoukai, sung by the Queen who was sealed in ice.

xearcs let laphin yahe, bie omia hec lihit clar
<There is no key to the doors of speech, that is sketched by the transparent fingertip>

noi-roo-xin, noi melras I noe-l-habes pianic cia eyen
<In the never-ending world, the jade-like phantoms had stopped their laments>

Her single singing voice reverberated among the surrounding azure ice, and a rich tone was formed due to that.

It was as though the dull colors had entwined by themselves, thus forming a beautiful rainbow - similarly, her voice has been deeply enriched by the multiple reflections due to the icy mirrors. It was a sonata that was cold and desolate, and yet filled with love at the same time.

=C hypn phenoria, Eec qhaon nes ei getie, nephies paf lef bis cley kis ei roos
<Sleep, children. Your wings are still young, and branches of safety are still too far away>

=C hypn phenoria, Eec wat nes ei getie bies killis cley kis ei mihas

Chapter 3

<Sleep, children. Your feet are still weak, and this frozen land is still too painful>

There is no score to this melody.

It is a thousand years old melody that is passed down through singing, from the Queen to the Priestesses, and the Priestesses among themselves. Ymy learned of its existence from Meimel as well, and learned it in this <<Paradise>> after listening carefully to the voice of the Queen.

evhes ualen, deus Uhw leya quo feo
<To who, are the prayers sung for?>

nefit Uhz yulis noi kamis egic, Sew ele nelar ris-ia sophia
<Even if the memories are to disappear, I will still be deep within it>

Ris sia sophia, kyel hiz phia nefis loar mille
<Up till the day, where one steps onto the promised land>

Shinryoku <Melody> — "Seventh Heaven Rhythm <Sophia Code>".

The secret melody known only between the Queen and the Priestesses, the song of prayer that maintains Hyouketsu Kyoukai.

"..... How beautiful."

Chapter 3

Ymy closed her eyes, and quietly listened from her spot. What a beautiful singing voice.

It has a tempo that naturally penetrates into the human heart, while the lyrics and melody are filled with a heart-wrenching frailness. She had always dreamed to sing this song as a Priestess.

..... However, there is just one thing that she could not really understand.

A small question in her mind, that she had never brought up to anyone before.

"It sounds..... really similar?"

That's right, it is indeed similar. The song that maintains the ultimate arts of shinryoku, and Yuugenshu's—

Oe/ Dia =U xeph cley, Di shela teo phes kaon
<■ ■, ■ ..... ■ ■, ■ ■ ■ , ... ■ ..... ■ ■>

And Yuugenshu's mateki is extremely similar.

The meaning to the lyrics of the song, the tone, the characteristics upon the activation of power, and even the lingering sounds of each and every note.

Chapter 3

"The place where the Priestesses are at is Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, and the melody <code> that flows within is the Seventh Heaven Rhythm <Sophia Code>..... Which means.....?"

The mateki of Yuugenshu has been commonly thought to be a depressing curse-like tone. However, since such a song exist within her own shinryoku, then, perhaps there is a song with a tone similar to hers, that resides within the Yuugenshu of Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>.

"..... Eden Code?"

Mateki - the melody <code> of Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>. If it really exist, then what sort of power does it hold? How does the Yuugenshu, which uses it, comes about in existence? And will it appear on the floating continent?

—One day, you will understand everything.

"Eh?"

Ymy raised her head quickly, as though she was electrocuted.

..... I thought I have heard the voice of the Queen just now. Was it my illusion?

Despite her staring into the crystal before her, the Queen within the azure ice walls remained unchanged.

That was obviously so. The Queen was concentrating on her prayers, thus there is no way she could have heard Ymy's words. Even if she hears it, she could not have made any reply.

"That's how it is....."

Ymy shook her head lightly, and showed a bitter smile.

Mmm, it's about time I go back. Ilis will get bored if I don't talk to her soon.

"Well then, Salah-sama. I will be back again later."

The Queen who continued singing, and her Seventh Heaven Rhythm <Sophia Code>. Humming along to the beautiful voice that flowed out of the azure ice, Ymy turned around and left the room.

Chapter 4: Yuugen

At the resting room of outdoor cafe 'The Two Swans <Albiero>'.

The young girl with her sky-blue scarf was continuously shaking the teenage boy, who was sleeping on the makeshift bed.

"Shel-nii, wake up quickly— The festival is starting soon—!"

"..... Let me sleep for an hour more. I had worked till late last night."

"No— if you don't hurry up, the festival will end soon! Hurry, hurry!"

..... The Stars Festival will be held for three consecutive days, so it will not really matter if we miss it today.

Sheltis grumbled in his mind, and opened his eyelids slightly. He coincidentally looked straight into a listless Yuto, who looked like she was about to cry.

"Shel-nii..... are you really not going?"

"Uh..... that....."

"Do you hate being with Yuto?"

"..... No, nothing of that sort..... Ahhh, damn..... I understand, I admit defeat, alright!"

He could not endure that pitiful look of hers, and jumped out of his bed in desperation.

The three days of Stars Festival, which is dedicated to the Queen, will be held at the Second Living Sector.

The whole plaza was filled with banners of stars and the moon, as well as ceremonial decorations like pinwheels and wind chimes, which symbolizes the never ending winds of the floating continent. In comparison, the streets had a more typical look to them. They were typically filled with colorful balloons or ribbons, and the streets were bustling with activity from the various types of stalls.

"Oh, it has really started. So it is that lively right from the opening ceremony."

Sheltis took a brief glance at the surroundings after he placed Yuto down. The place was already filled with people, to the point where one will easily brush onto the shoulders of the passerby while walking.

"Ah- Sheltis! You are slow, I've waited for so long!"

The girl in overalls walked through the crowd. Her left hand was holding on a balloon, while the right was cotton candy.

"..... You are enjoying yourself really early."

"Well, I am waiting for you guys while enjoying myself. Ah, the balloon's for Yuto. Here's the pocket money as well - you can buy whatever you like."

Chapter 4

"Yay! I like Eyri-nee the most!"

Having received the pocket money and the balloon, Yuto ran towards the stalls excitedly.

"Is it fine for Yuto to be alone? It will be bad if she gets lost."

Eyriey showed a confident smile:

"Don't underestimate me. There's a tracker attached to that balloon."

"..... So you have already expected her to get lost..... Forget it, it will be fine if we can get hold of her location."

Giving up on Yuto, who was already out of sight, Sheltis walked on with Eyriey.

Countless stalls were lined up along the two sides of the streets. Despite food and game stalls taking up more than half of the numbers, there were a few unique stalls around as well.

"Ah, Sheltis, look at that. There's a stall with a signboard that says, 'Helping you to find your lost items'."

"Probably a shinryoku spell that grants far-sight. It should not be a difficult spell if the area of effect is not too wide. Should be popular at festivals like these."

On the other side, was a temporary clinic set up by a shinryoku healer.

Chapter 4

In this civilization where shinryoku and machines blend in harmony, the rapid mechanization may cause an illusion of a decline in shinryoku's usage, but in festivals like these, there are still remains of shinryoku deeply rooted into their culture.

"Oh right, Eyriey. How's it going?"

"Hmm? This cotton candy is delicious. Sheltis wanna try some?"

"I don't mean that....."

"I know, I know. You are talking about the message that I had left at Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, right?"

Her mindless speech in the crowd had caused Sheltis to be in quite a shock. However, there was no suspicious glares from nearby. In such a festive place, there should be no one who is interested in listening to the conversation of others.

"There's no action from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> yet. Since it was left there only yesterday, plus the fact that Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> is busy preparing the ceremony of handover from the Queen to the Priestesses, there's not much hope to begin with - wasn't you the one who had said that, Sheltis?"

"Mmm..... you are right. Not to mention, this is all just my hunch."

He lifted his head and looked into the sky.

Blue and white. On the blue sphere of sky that reminds one of the deep seas, were clouds floating at a soothing pace. There is also chalk

colored Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, that pierces through the clouds and the sky.

"Eyriey, isn't it time for the cannon salutes?"

When the Queen's praying period is over, the control of the barrier will be transferred to the Priestesses. At the same time, Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> will fire the cannon salutes, to signify the official start of the Stars Festival.

However—

"..... Eh? That's strange."

The person who broke the silence was Eyriey.

"What's wrong?"

"No, it just feels strange. It's already past the scheduled time for the cannon salutes."

She took a look at the clock located on top of the street light, and compared it with her own watch.

"Hmm? It's the same? My watch seems normal."

There was no cannon salutes. That meant the control of Hyouketsu Kyoukai was not successfully transferred over. Logically speaking, that was something that will never happen. The maintenance of Hyouketsu Kyoukai is a huge ritual that is linked to the survival of

the floating continent. At the very least, the time in regards to the handover should be flawlessly accurate.

Could it be that some accident had happened?

"..... Ymy."

As he mumbled out the name of the girl who is already a Priestess, Sheltis looked towards the huge tower.

"Meimel, Syun-rei. I've made you guys wait."

The two Priestesses were already waiting for Ymy in the middle of the room when she reached the floor.

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, two hundred and eighty first story - the Grand Holy Hall.

The ceremonial equipment shining in a yellow brilliance, together with a huge colorful stained glass etched with images of the stars and the moon. This is the biggest praying hall in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, as well as the sacred room that is used for the initial training for the Priestesses.

"..... Morning, Ymy."

The Priestess dressed in kimono turned around. The expressions on the typically docile girl was much more stiffer than usual. It was probably due to her nervousness.

"Morning, Syun-rei. Let's work hard together today!"

Chapter 4

"..... Mmm!"

The people outside Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> were perhaps already enjoying a lively celebration of the Stars Festival.

However, for the Priestesses, they were about to carry out their absolute mission. They are to gain control of the barrier from the Queen, and then the three of them will have to maintain Hyouketsu Kyoukai together for three whole days.

"Speaking of which, Meimel doesn't seem nervous at all."

"Fufu, how rude - I am really nervous too?"

Despite saying that, there was still a slight smile on Meimel's face.

"Alright, the three of us are already here. Salah-sama has been maintaining the barrier for a month, and she is nearly at her limits. We should hurry there to take over, yeah?"

There is the Queen, and her five Priestesses. However, not all Priestesses are staying in the tower. In practice, there will always be around two Priestesses who are in charge of patrolling the borders of the continent. This time, the three Priestesses staying in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> will be tasked with maintaining the barrier.

"Well I'll be heading there first. See ya later!"

Meimel gave a slight teasing look. She then disappeared into the lift.

Chapter 4

Her destination is the highest story of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> - the story named <<Paradise>>, where the Queen was. The handing over of Hyouketsu Kyoukai cannot be passed to all Priestesses at one go. As such, by sequence, the Queen will first hand it over to Meimel, then to Syun-rei, and finally to Ymy.

"..... Leon."

"Syun-rei, don't look so worried. Just do as you normally do."

The silver-haired young man propped his body off the wall of the Holy Hall.

"You need not worry about the things of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. You just have to focus on maintaining Hyouketsu Kyoukai. Leave the rest to me."

"..... Mmm!"

The girl let out an almost inaudible voice, and nodded her head.

"..... I'll do my best."

With that, the black-haired Priestess trotted towards the lift as well. Upon seeing all of that, Ymy could not help but to mutter.

"..... Leon is really something."

"How so?"

The young man gave her a questioning look.

"It feels like Syun-rei trusts you from the bottom of her heart."

"Obviously."

Leon's reply was not out of pride. There must be a undoubted trust between the Priestess and the Sennenshi who is in charge of protecting her. However..... why was it so? Despite knowing that it is something to be expected, she still could not help but to be envious of Syun-rei and Leon's relationship.

..... If only I can have someone whom I can entrust myself to, just like how they are-

"Ymy?"

"..... No, nothing. Sorry for the sudden lapse."

Ymy hurriedly squeezed a smile, and acted as though nothing had happened.

"Ah, that's right. Can I put this in your care?"

She took down the necklace which has a blue crystal hanging from it, and handed it to Leon.

"That's how it is. Please take care of me, Leon."

"Ah, so it is Ilis."

Chapter 4

"I will not be back for these three days, so I hope there will be someone whom she can talk to."

"This fella is really troublesome."

"Can you please use the words 'afraid of loneliness' instead? Not to mention, you should have nothing much to do as well, since Syun-rei is not around."

Crystal-machine <Ilis> flashed about in Leon's hand.

"Well then. I shall get going as well. I will leave the rest of the things to you both."

Ymy stretched out her hand in front of the small lift located in the Holy Hall.

It was then, when she heard something.

Ding..... innnnn..... nnn.....

Ymy stopped her footsteps, and turned her head subconsciously.

It was the sound of a solid object cracking, nearing the cries of a wail. The stained glass of the Holy Hall perhaps? No, that's not right. They were perfectly fine.

"..... It's as though..... something has broke?"

It was a sorrowful sound which was not commonly heard, that induces a feeling of numbness to the listener. Did it come from below

her feet? No, it came from way further than that. Not from the floating continent either, but something that is deeper-

"What's wrong, Ymy?"

"Leon..... what's the sound just now?"

In actual fact, that sound was really faint - it was like the illusion of a mirage. But she had indeed heard it. That-

Just then, her sight was dyed red.

The lights from the ceiling disappeared in an instant, and was replaced with the red lights used in emergencies.

"A warning? What's happening? Oi, tower controls! Can you hear me! What is happening?"

Leon yelled at the receivers at the ceiling.

Za..... zaza.....

With a piercing sound, a broadcast came from the ceilings-

"Warning, this is an automated message to all members of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

Currently, the Queen has declared the status of a level one emergency.

According to Tower's Law article number twenty-one, all members are to stop their current task, and take instructions from the Queen."

Chapter 4

The broadcast stopped, and all that was left was the warning sirens.

"What's happening? A level one emergency..... it can't be....."

The level one emergency will only be activated when the floating continent is facing a crisis of being destroyed. It also means that humans are facing the danger of annihilation.

"Ymy, you said you had heard a sort of breaking sound, right?"

Even the tone of crystal-machine <Ilis> was filled with an anxiety that had never been felt before.

"Actually, at that instant, my systems had detected a huge reading of mateki while it was monitoring Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>. Base on the standard strength of a typical Yuugenshu, its strength is akin to that of hundreds, maybe even a thousand Yuugenshu."

"Hundreds..... how can that be possible? Ilis?"

If that was real, then it would be the biggest amount ever seen since Hyouketsu Kyoukai has been erected.

"..... What exactly is happening here?"

Ymy clutched onto her wildly beating chest. As a Priestess who maintains the barrier, she has never encountered a situation as bewildering as that.

Chapter 4

There will always be a few Yuugenshu that manage to break through Hyouketsu Kyoukai alone every year. However, that was due to them doing it alone, resulting in them being able to squeeze through the narrow gaps of the barrier.

But this time, there was over hundreds of Yuugenshu from Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden> that broke through the barrier at the same time?

"..... Hyouketsu Kyoukai was breached."

The voice came from Syun-rei, who should have had headed to the highest level earlier on.

Following her, was the Priestess in her gown.

"This is bad— What a headache."

Meimel's tone was as lazy as ever. However, her pace of walking was significantly faster, as though she was being chased by something.

"So even Meimel has came over..... what exactly has happened?"

"Calm down, Ymy. I'll explain it to you right now. Run, you there?"

"—Yes."

Kree.....ee.....e..... A dull sound rang, and the silver-decorated door of the Holy Hall was slowly opening. Behind the doors, stood a girl, whose skin was engraved with ritual marks.

"Firstly, there's me and Leon for the Sennenshi. As for the Priestesses, we have these three. Generally, that's all we have for the top brass in the tower. Though I am not sure what exactly is happening, but the situation seems to be really serious. According to the instructions from the top, all departments of the various guards are to gather at the two hundred and sixtieth story to await for further orders. At the lower levels, all Lions Squads have already been gathered, and are currently on a roll call. Currently, the Second, Forth and Fifth Lions Squad are ready to be deployed."

"That's excellent, Run. As expected from my Sennenshi-"

The teenage girl's concise report put a small smile on Meimel's face.

"In any case, I shall briefly explain the situation. Just like what Syun-rei had said, Hyouketsu Kyoukai was breached."

..... Impossible.

Having heard Meimel's explaination, Ymy felt as though it was all just a dream, and could not believe that it was all real. Hyouketsu Kyoukai is the strongest shinryoku barrier that has not been breached for over a thousand years, so why now-

"To be honest, the reason for its breach is probably due to us humans underestimating the Yuugenshu..... The Yuugenshu have targeted the moment when Hyouketsu Kyoukai is at its weakest."

The barrier will become weak?

Only one thing came to mind.

Chapter 4

"Could it be—!"

"That's right, the instance when the Queen handover the control to the Priestesses. During the moment where the Queen passes control to the Priestesses, there will be a brief pause in the prayer that maintains the barrier, no? It seems like they have locked their sight on that brief window-"

The words "Star Festival" flashed past Ymy's mind, together with a chill that ran down her spine.

The festival starts at the same time as the Queen finishes her prayers. It was almost like the festival is announcing to everyone about the exact moment of the handover.

At the same time, she recalled what seemed to be a warning message, that Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> had received.

"Warning - there is abnormalities in the behaviors of the Yuugenshu."

So that warning was real..... If only she had tried to confirm its validity, perhaps-

"In any case, we have no time to be regretting. Meimel, please carry on."

"Well, up till now, there is only a small portion of Hyouketsu Kyoukai that is breached. It's a hole about the size of a few hundred

meters. From the sheer size of Hyouketsu Kyoukai, that is nothing more than just a dot. That hole was opened for only a few seconds, and it has already been patched..... However, the problem is-"

At then, Meimel closed her mouth. It was not like she was hesitating to say it, but rather, there was no need for her to continue.

The Yuugenshu has always been waiting for the chance to attack the floating continent. For those strange beasts, a small 'hole' in Hyouketsu Kyoukai is more than enough for them.

Those unknown presence, has always been waiting for this very moment-

"In any case, I think the observation units should have detected over a thousand Yuugenshu that had passed the barrier..... By the estimation of Salah-sama, we have about an hour before the first wave of attacks from the Yuugenshu arrives."

Huge amounts of Yuugenshu were rising from the Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden> ten thousand meters below, up towards the floating continent. The sheer size is something that has never been seen before since the establishment of Hyouketsu Kyoukai, and their intention was-

"The observation units of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> has send back numerous reports. The Yuugenshu are currently moving upwards towards the floating continent in various large groups, instead of acting individually. From that, we can deduce that they are not targeting the whole floating continent, but rather, they are attacking a specific place."

Everyone went silent for a moment after hearing Ilis' explaination.

There can only be one target on the floating continent.

Without a doubt, it is Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. The Yuugenshu will be here soon.

"..... Meimel, what should we do? Salah-sama should be at her limits soon."

Ymy looked at the senior Priestess in front of her, while clenching on to her trembling fist.

For the guards of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> like Leon and Run, the number of Yuugenshu was just way too huge for them to handle.

Without the support of the Priestesses, they will definitely suffer from huge casualties. However, the three Priestesses are required to maintain Hyouketsu Kyoukai, as the Queen is about to be exhausted of her strength.

"Salah-sama is nearing her limits, and as for us..... aside of concentrating on maintaining Hyouketsu Kyoukai, there is not much we can do. That said, are we letting Leon and the rest of them to fight against the Yuugenshu by themselves?"

"That's our only option."

The silent silver-haired young man broke his silence with a sigh.

"Run and I will gather our remaining subordinates who are on standby, to prepare for the attack."

However, a Priestess clutch onto his coat.

"Syun-rei?"

"..... Leon, don't..... Leon will die, so don't go alone."

The black-haired girl shook her head repeatedly, with an expression close to crying - Leon himself knew, that this is an attack by the Yuugenshu with a scale that was never before seen in history. There are some variants among the Yuugenshu that are strong enough to even take down a huge dragon by itself. No matter how strong a Sennenshi is, to be facing against such a number of enemies-

"But, what else can we do?"

"Hold on. That is just too reckless. We can assist you guys, but-"

Just when Leon was planning to shake Syun-rei off.

Meimel placed her hand on his shoulders.

"Listen. Us Priestesses can support the Sennenshi for up to a maximum of three hours. That is the time limit that determines if the floating continent will fall."

Upon hearing that, Leon stopped moving.

"..... What do you mean?"

"I am about to explain that, but I need to tell it to everyone on the floating continent as well. Ymy, Syun-rei, you two come over here."

Meimel elegantly waved her hands.

"I am about to send a telepathy message to the Priestesses and Sennenshi that are patrolling the borders, as well as the people of the floating continent. Similar to Hyouketsu Kyoukai, it will be easier if us three are to split our jobs. I will be in charge of the putting the spell together, while Syun-rei will be in charge of controlling the spell. Lastly, Ymy will be providing the necessary shinryoku required."

"..... Hold on, Meimel."

Run walked over with loud footsteps.

"Telepathy is Syun-rei's strength, and you are in charge of putting the spell together, so I have nothing against that. However, won't the burden be too great on Ymy?"

The telepathy shall spread throughout the floating continent.

That means, that Ymy will have to release her shinryoku to cover the whole of the giant continent.

"Well, don't worry. Ymy's not too good at controlling spells, but the amount of her shinryoku is shockingly deep. You should know that too, right? Aside from Salah-sama, Ymy is the only other person who can maintain Hyouketsu Kyoukai for three days, as though it was nothing."

"Still-"

"..... Run, thanks for your concern. However, I am willing to do it."

Facing Run who was still not willing to back down, Ymy gave her a nod of agreement.

Just do it without reservation. At that situation, it was due to the trust of the senior Priestess in her, that she was delegating such an important task to her.

"Ymy is a really good girl. It may be slightly tiring later, but not to worry. Your spells may be in a hopeless state, but it seems like you have a limitless source of energy to power them."

"..... Meimel, are you trying to turn around and be sarcastic at me?"

"Nothing of that sort. Well then, Ymy and Syun-rei. Let us resonate the spell with <<Threefold Sonata>>. Can you two do that?"

Her originally smiling expression disappeared in an instant. Her eyes became sharp with the smile of hers gone.

"Just do like we always do during practice. Don't worry, you both have accumulated quite a bit of experience from training already."

Upon hearing her said that, Ymy and Syun-rei could not help but to look at each other.

..... Aside from practices, that was the first time they were using it.

Chapter 4

<<Threefold Sonata>> is an aria sung by three spellcasters. They not only have to sing in unison, but their lyrics have to conform to the other two singers as well, resulting in a melody with hundreds of combinations of different lyrics. Due to that, it was extremely difficult.

"Well then - Ymy, Syun-rei and me. Let us synchronize ourselves."

The Holy Hall became dead quiet in an instant.

All sound had disappeared from the sacred hall, including the faint sounds of breathing.

Lin Endes pel On Nes
<I, shall release the ever-changing blessings>

phia-So la telah sitra
<The triangular door shall light up our prayers>

ele So Phi-a Arma-Riris
<Please accept in all wishes that I can grant>

氷結鏡界のエデン - Hyouketsu Kyoukai no Eden Volume 1 - Paradise Illusion

Chapter 4

		Following along the left side	Singing along to the melody
Threefold Sonata	Under the domains of the territory	This shall be the main tune	That links the melody together
		Following along the right side	Singing along to the melody

A lengthy tone A dreamy timbre Circling the world Weaving into time
A faraway tone Luring people to sleep Converting into pulsation Changing into spiral
An unrestricted tone Filled with rules Creating ripples Surpassing countless forms

The great Blessings from within Words and phrases Are briefly sketched
The intricate And unparalleled glamour Words and phrases Interweaving together
The swirling Resonance overflows Similar to thin lines Circling endlessly

The trails of the dream Awakens the slumber from the faraway garden Dreams and reality Satisfy my body
The woven dreams The streams of the world transforms into a mirror Rules and regulations Makes me feel fulfilled
The burning stone within my embrace The scattered parts shall gather here today The lyrics and song Fills me up

The falling stars Streaks past the rings of the deep All so that I can know you here
The settling moon The intricate occasion All so that I can liberate you here
The torrential rain Flows along the lands All so that I can find you here

Winds Everything that is moving Shall become A miraculous road of impact
Winds Everything that has fluttered down Shall become A endless road of for the circling stars
Winds Everything that is ruffled up Shall become A road of hope for thousands

—	The Forth Princess	Under the guidance of the domain,	Using the procedures of the thirty-third power of verse three to construct the world
—	The Second Princess	Under the guidance of the barrier,	Using the procedures of the thirty-third power of verse three to create the world
—	The Fifth Princess	Under the guidance of the baptism,	Using the procedures of the thirty-third power of verse three to recreate the world

Chapter 4

.....plop

The sound akin to a falling water droplet, is the sound created by the spreading lights of shinryoku.

Similar to how a water droplet strikes the surface of a pool, which creates small ripples - the light that envelops the three Priestesses are expanding outwards at a blinding pace.

It passes through the walls of the Holy Hall, and went out of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. The light gradually stretches out to a size big enough to encase Orbie Clar, including the other conservation areas that are outside of the floating continent.

"..... Capture."

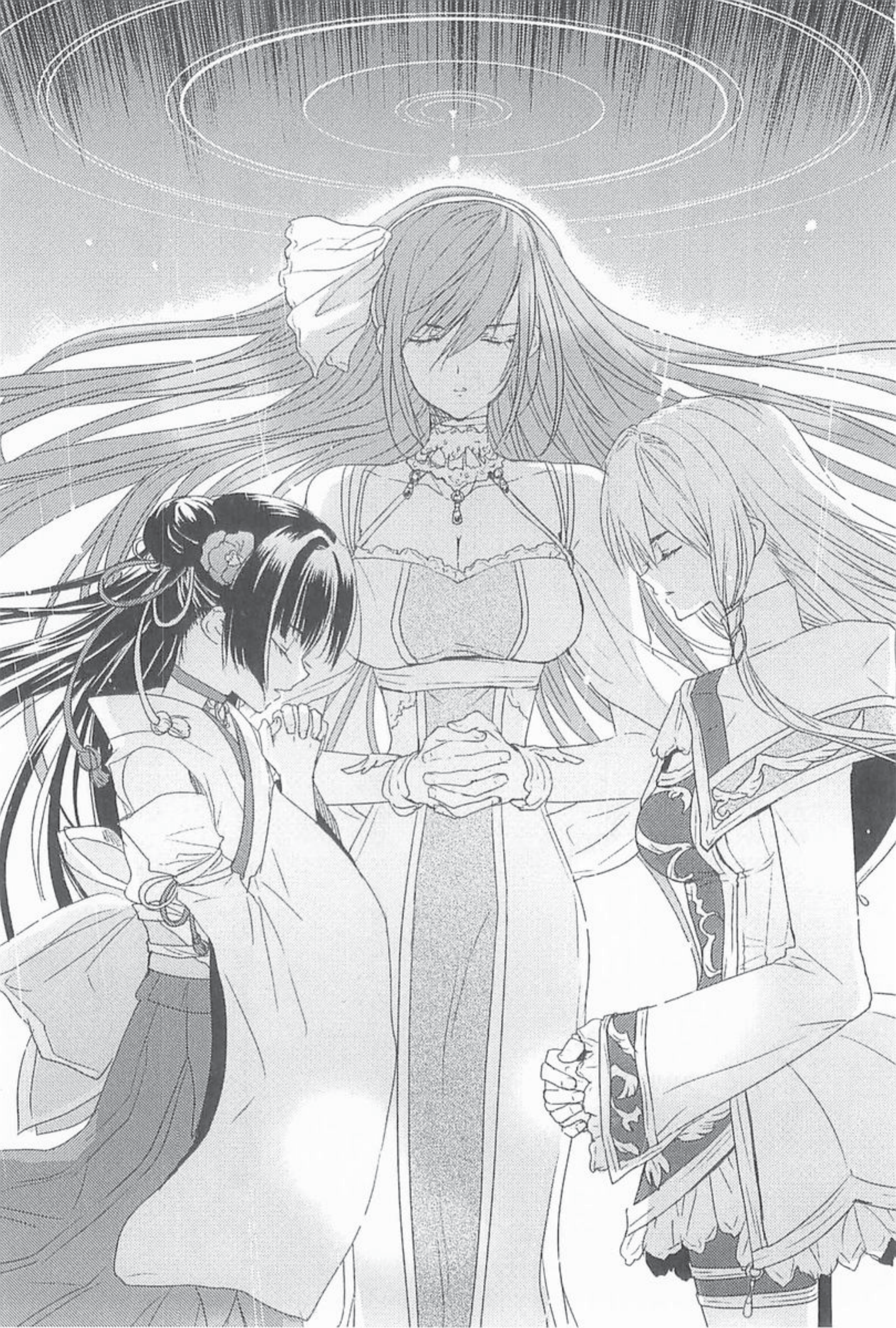
Syun-rei opened her tightly shut eyes.

Her gentle black pupils were giving off a emerald glow, having received the shinryoku required for the territorial spells.

"..... Nature sector, to the north of the Park Number Three. The southwest side of the conservation sector. There are traces of Priestesses and Sennenshi."

"It's tough for you, Syun-rei, but please continue to trace their location. I shall be performing the telepathy. Ah— ahem."

"To the two pairs of Priestesses and Sennenshi that are patrolling, it has been hard on you all. As for the people of the living sector, good



day everyone. I am Priestess Meimel. Sorry for the sudden interruption, but I have something important to tell everyone, so I have no choice but to do it via telepathy."

An amplified voice of Meimel rang in Ymy's mind. Not just herself, but Leon and Run, and everyone in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> should be hearing Meimel's voice as well.

"Everyone, listen to me calmly - just not too long ago, Hyouketsu Kyoukai, which seals Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>, has been breached by the Yuugenshu."

"Meimel!"

Leon lifted his head in shock. Meimel was way too direct with her speech.

The contents of the telepathy bears a huge impact. The residents may fall into a state of panic should they know that Hyouketsu Kyoukai had been breached.

"Leon, believe in her."

Ymy nodded at the silver-haired young man.

..... Meimel knew that better than anyone here, so please trust her in whatever she is about to do.

"Thousands of Yuugenshu are approaching Orbie Clar. To elaborate, the floating continent shall come under their attack within less than an hour."

The tall Priestess continued on without pausing.

There was no room for hesitation - Meimel's calm tone clearly emphasized that point.

At the same time, her message cannot be vague. That will result in her unease being revealed for all to see, which will cause panic among the residents of the living sector, resulting in chaos.

"Does everyone understand the situation we are in? As such, I seek cooperation from the residents of the living sector. Please head to the underground shelters within thirty minutes. The guards of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> will be protecting those places with their lives on the line. Understand?"

Meimel heaved a huge breathe of air.

This time, her audiences had been changed to the fellow comrades that were outside of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

"The following content goes out to the two Priestesses and the two Sennenshi that are on patrol. Due to the time constrains, I'll cut to the chase..... Just as you have all heard, the situation is in a dire state."

The Priestess in her gown shrugged her shoulders.

Her tone was as lazy as ever, but it had a sense of authority in them.

"Currently, our biggest problem is that there are just too many Yuugenshu that have broken past the barrier. The Sennenshi and

guards in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> will not be able to handle them all by themselves. As such, the Priestesses will have to support as well..... However, that will result in a situation where there will be no one who can maintain Hyouketsu Kyoukai. Queen-sama is about to reach her physical limits, so the Priestesses will have to take over as quickly as possible."

However, if the Priestesses are to take over at the highest story, then there will only be the Sennenshi left that will be fighting against the incoming Yuugenshu.

"As such, I am about to convey the suggestion from the Queen - ready?"

"I can still hold Hyouketsu Kyoukai by myself for about three hours.

All Priestesses, Sennenshi and the guards on standby are to eliminate the Yuugenshu that has broken past the barrier within the time period..... However, I will not be able to do anything should the time exceeds three hours. Once the time is up, the Priestesses will have to take over the control of Hyouketsu Kyoukai. Please remember that clearly."

Eliminate the Yuugenshu within three hours, and then the Priestesses are to take over the control of Hyouketsu Kyoukai from the Queen. Those are the absolute conditions for protecting the floating continent.

"As such, I am asking a favor from the Priestesses who are patrolling outside of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. As you all know, Yuugenshu are

a creature with a mist-like body, and are floating upwards from Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden> ten thousand meters from below. They will be reaching the borders of the floating continent first, which means they will strike from the conservation sector and the nature sector. As such, prior to them attacking the living sector, please reduce their numbers as much as you can. Thirty..... no, a minimum of forty percent. The rest of us in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> shall take care of the remaining Yuugenshu. That's all, and good luck everyone."

The telepathy ended.

Meimel turned around, her forehead filled with sweat.

"Everyone heard it as well. We have to destroy all Yuugenshu within three hours, then gain control of Hyouketsu Kyoukai from the Queen. These are the absolute conditions to protect the floating continent. Once the time is over, even if there are remaining Yuugenshu, the Priestesses will still have to head to the highest story. We will not be able to wait, even if we are to see the Yuugenshu attacking others."

"That's enough. That is what us Sennenshi is here for."

Having received Leon's agreement, Meimel showed a smile.

"That's really trustworthy. Then I shall leave this place to Syun-rei and Ymy - let's go, Run."

With that, the Priestess turned away from everyone else.

"Meimel, where are you going?"

"Do you even have to ask? Who will be protecting the civilians if we do not head over to the living sector?"

The senior Priestess replied calmly, with her back still facing them.

"But, what about Hyouketsu Kyoukai?"

"Ymy, I shall leave Hyouketsu Kyoukai to you. We have always deployed multiple people to maintain the barrier, in order to play safe. However, you should have undergone training to maintain Hyouketsu Kyoukai by yourself, right? In actual fact, one Priestess is all it needs to maintain the barrier. To be safe, Syun-rei can support as well. Shouldn't the remaining Priestess lend their strength on the battlefield?"

"But.....! If so, let me go instead. Should Meimel leave Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>-"

Currently, the one in command is Meimel.

Ymy and Syun-rei lacks the experience, and has never lead the whole of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> before.

"Ymy? How are you able to lead the battle without a Sennenshi protecting you by your side?"

"That..... However, didn't Meimel say that Priestesses are absolutely not allowed to die?"

An important task of protecting the civilians will be added to their objectives, should they head to the living sector to fight. Despite being a Priestess, such a mission would be way too dangerous for her.

..... As such, being the Priestess of the lowest position, I should be the one heading out. Should anything happens to me, they should be able to find a replacement for me easily.

"Ymy."

The senior Priestess in front of her slowly turned her body.

"You must remember - there is no Priestess who should die in vain. The positions are just arbitrary - it does not mean that I am more important than you, due to me having a higher position than you."

..... How unbelievable. The positions of the Priestesses are bestowed by the Queen herself. Ymy was surprised to hear that from Meimel, as someone who views the positions with great importance, more so than anyone else.

"Just like how Syun-rei is good at territorial spells such as far-sight and telepathy, you do possess the absolute strength of shinryoku. Every Priestess have fields which they are good at - for me, its the barrier types. I am the only one who can construct barriers around the shelters, and fight."

"Still..... Even more reason for me to go!"

Facing Meimel who had continuously kept her calm, Ymy raised her voice.

If she is to direct her powers to the barriers of the shelters, then Meimel will not have enough shinryoku to protect herself. Should she come under an attack from Yuugenshu in that condition.....

"Ymy, that's what Priestesses are. Priestesses are to protect the floating continent with all their might, while the Sennenshi are in charge of protecting the Priestesses. The floating continent can retain stability for over a thousand years due to such a trusting relationship. It is natural of us to put ourselves in danger to protect the people of the living sector. Isn't that right, Run?"

Meimel winked at her guardian and Sennenshi.

"Don't worry. I will protect Meimel."

..... I have finally understood.

I understand how deep the trust is between the Priestesses and their Sennenshi. I have understood what I, someone who does not have my Sennenshi, lack. The absolute relationship that is brought down for over a thousand years, is right in front of me.

"Well then, it's been decided - we shall be in charge of destroying the Yuugenshu that are heading towards the living sector. Despite us aiming to annihilate all of the Yuugenshu, considering the fact that we have to protect the civilians who cannot escape in time, we can probably clear about forty to fifty percent of them. As such, once they have broken past this line of defense, there will be nothing else protecting Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. Leon, I shall put Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> in your hands..... You must put in all your effort. I

shall not let you off should anything happens to the Priestesses and the Queen."

"You just like to worry for nothing. You yourself should concentrate on protecting Meimel."

Having heard Run's provoking speech, Leon struck back with an aggressive smile.

"Syun-rei, Ymy. I shall be engaging the Yuugenshu at the hall at two hundred and forty first story. Please take over the defense of the Holy Hall. Once three hours is up, head over to the highest story."

"..... Mmm."

Ymy placed her hands gently on her chest, and gave a nod..... the overwhelming pressure had caused her chest to hurt a little. The final line of defense is herself and Syun-rei. That place shall be the last fortress that protects the Queen.

"Ymy, what about this fella?"

Leon took out crystal-machine <Ilis>, that was tied to a necklace.

"Leon, bring me along with you. I can observe on the Yuugenshu that are entering Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, and give you the respective reports. You can then instruct your subordinates at the hall."

"Well, it seems like everything has been settled. Well then, dismiss. Let's hope that we can all be safe."

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Meimel clapped her hands, and gave her last order.

The Grand Holy Hall. Everyone at there began to make their moves, according to the tasks assigned to them.

"Just not too long ago, Hyouketsu Kyoukai, which seals Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>, has been breached by the Yuugenshu."

— Priestess Meimel's telepathy message had spread through the whole of the living sector.

Yells, shrieks and chaos filled the streets in an instant.

Everyone, including the storekeepers, started to run. People separated from their families, and people searching for their lost lovers. The crowd formed a tsunami, which swarmed towards the shelters with an earth-shaking rumble.

Sheltis stood on his ground, and looked at the scene for a long time.

"..... That's terrible. Things are way worse than I had imagined."

He gritted his teeth. To think that Hyouketsu Kyoukai will be breached.....

"She..... Sheltis! What should we do? Should we follow the instructions of that Priestess, and escape to the shelters?"

Eyriey was already by his side without him noticing.

— Those trembling lips did not seem to be just his imagination.

"We are just ordinary civilians, so that's the only thing we can do for now."

If the words of the Priestess was true, then the Queen is still at the highest point of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. That was an emergency message released by the Priestess in place of the Queen, who was unable to do so. Its contents are absolute, not to be questioned or refuted.

"..... We should locate Yuto first."

"Shel-nii—!"

A familiar girl's voice came from a tiny crack of the incoming crowd. However, the sound was immediately drowned by the stampede and the screams.

"Yuto!"

Following the source of the sound, Sheltis pried open the crowd. Just before the short girl was about to be squeezed to the ground, Sheltis grabbed hold of her hand.

"Yuto..... That's great. We've got you."

"Shel-nii, what's wrong with these people?"

Yuto looked at the escaping crowd in confusion. Perhaps it was due to her enjoying herself too much, but it seemed like Yuto had heard nothing about the Priestess' warning.

"No, nothing. Let us escape. Follow me!"

He pulled Yuto's hand, and just when he was about to leave in a hurry-

"..... Eh? Shel-nii is running away?"

Despite allowing her hand to be grabbed by Sheltis, Yuto did not move an inch away from the ground.

"Mmm. We have no time to explain. We have to get to the shelters first."

"Yuto wants to be with Shel-nii."

"I know. I will be accompanying you at the shelters too."

"No, I don't mean it like that."

The little girl shook her head gently. Her sky-blue scarf was blown upwards by the winds.

"Shel-nii will protect me, right?"

"—Eh?"

Badump

Deep inside, it was as though something else was beating, and not his heart.

"It's fine as long as Shel-nii protects Yuto if Yuto is with Shel-nii "

"..... Me?"

His steps towards the shelters had stopped as well.

"As long as Shel-nii protects Yuto, then it's fine. Shel-nii had saved me at the park too....."

His throat was parched. He could speak not a single word.

..... I can save others from the wrath of Yuugenshu?

..... Me, a person who has lost everything after being exiled by Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> - who is not even allowed to meet the Priestesses?

"Sheltis, what's wrong?"

"No..... N-Nothing."

A worried Eyriey then shook her hands in panic.

"Really, stop standing there and start moving! We are supposed to escape to shelter six. It's a little far from here, so we have to hurry."

— Seek shelters? Is it really fine to do that? Could it be that I am hoping to seek protection from someone else?

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The voice that reverberated in his heart countless times was none other than his own.

His childhood friend whom he was banned from making any sort of contact, has already become a Priestess who protects the floating continent. His past friend too, is a Sennenshi who is protecting his Priestess. Both of them are already figures commanding respect from everyone in the floating continent.

On the other hand, he is just an ordinary civilian from the living sector.

There was only one thing that he can do. That is to pray in the living sector, and hope that both Ymy and Leon will be safe.

..... That was something I had told myself two years ago.

But, what's with this sense of anxiety that I can't shake off from me?

"Ymy....."

Amid the surrounding shouts and shrieks, Sheltis turned his body, against the flow of traffic.

— He then looked at the tall white tower.

***

The Third Residential Sector.

Chapter 4

This is the area furthest away from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, and closest to the nature sector as well. Different from the commercialized Second Residential Sector, this area has a strong emphasis on housings, with lots of apartments everywhere.

However, there was no one to be seen on the streets.

"There is no one on the streets. Houses..... are empty as well. Everyone must have followed instructions and sought shelter."

Yet, a dozen or so pairs of footsteps had rang through the silent streets.

They were a group of people with an obviously different atmosphere around them as compared to your ordinary civilians. They were dressed in robes, coats and gowns. Despite their strange attires, everyone was in their pure white ceremonial clothes.

— They are the guards and apprentice-Priestesses of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

Aside from closed-ranged weapons like great swords and spears, there were also bows, throwing weapons and firearms. All of them are the rare experts in their fields of combat styles or shinryoku arts.

"How quiet. Run, can we impose ourselves at the houses of the civilians for a while?"

"Meimel, you are thinking of having tea-break already? But we have not settled things yet."

Chapter 4

The Second Lion Squad of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

Standing next to the Priestess in lead, Run shrugged her shoulders.

"We have to rest when we have the chance to - don't you all think so?"

Flipping her gown-like vestment aside, Meimel turned her head.

However, no one from the Lion Squad gave an answer.

..... Isn't it obvious? We are nervous too.

"Meimel, could it be that you are really tired?"

Meimel had visited all ten shelters in the living sector, and cast anti-Yuugenshu barriers at all of them, before arriving here. Run had no idea how draining that was, but it was definitely a huge burden for Meimel.

"Well of course - I am already panting from the walk."

Meimel stopped in her tracks.

In front of the many guards, was a huge protective metal wall. Its height is over ten meters tall, and it serves to separate the living sector from the nature sector, and at the same time, protect humans from the attacks of wild beasts.

"Not too long ago, the two Priestesses at the nature sector and conservation sector had sent a telepathy message."

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"What did they say?"

"They said they were in battle. There is way too much Yuugenshu..... 'There are a few hundreds that has bypassed the line of defense, and are heading towards the living sector'. The communication was cut right after they said that. It seems like they had no energy left to spare for telepathy."

The tall Priestess turned her back to the wall she was looking at earlier. Her gaze was directed to the guards of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, all on standby and awaiting orders.

"Just as all of you guards should know, I had already done imprinting rituals onto everyone's ceremonial clothes, so it should offer some sort of resistance against the mateki of the Yuugenshu. However, the Yuugenshu that we are about to face, are all the strong variants that has breached the barriers. One must be prepared for the worse should they come into contact with the Yuugenshu's mateki. I'll stress this first: I will not have spare time to help those who are infected."

Upon being infected by mateki, even the guards of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> will not be spared.

Out of the various effects of mateki, the most representative ones are poison, permanent coma, decay and mental corruption. The worse thing is, all it takes is just a touch of the mateki, to be infected by its curse. There is only one way to cure it, and that is to be purified by someone with strong shinryoku. However, they will be beyond hope if they are to receive the treatment too late.

There will be no time for purification. Meimel's speech was similar to her saying that she will watch them die.

"Mmm, that can't be helped."

Run added.

None of the members of the Lion Squad showed an expression of surprise. If they are frightened by such tiny matters, they will not be able to survive their daily training, much less becoming a guard of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

"That's fine. Though I think some of you guys may have the wrong idea about what I am trying to say-"

"Wrong idea?"

Run raised her eyebrows when she heard Meimel's mutter.

"Run, repeat the line that I always say, so that the others can have a listen."

"Mmm, let me see..... 'The Queen and the Priestesses who support Hyouketsu Kyoukai are the most precious lives on the floating continent. You people are the guards who has sworn your lives to defend the Priestesses. I absolutely cannot die. If my live is to come under danger, then please sacrifice yourself to protect me' — right?"

That is the unwritten rule that the guards of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> adheres to.

Chapter 4

As the members of the Second Lion Squad, everyone already knows that mantra of Meimel by now.

"Don't worry. No one from my team has tried to escape from a battle before."

"....."

However, Meimel was silent for quite a while.

"Meimel?"

"Speaking of that, I have something I had forgotten to tell everyone."

With a slightly embarrassed expression, the Priestesses took a deep breath of air.

"Just like I have always said, as a Priestess who maintains the barrier, I cannot die. Should something happen to me, then it is the guards' highest priority to sacrifice themselves to protect me. However, that only applies when the Priestess is in danger, so listen carefully - a truly capable guard will never allow the situation where the Priestess is exposed to danger."

Meimel then turned around yet again.

Looking at the wall in front of her, she continued,

"The Second Lion Squad falls directly under Run and my command. I do think that you people are the finest guards in the whole of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. Precisely so, you guys should be able to do

it, right? If the Priestess is not exposed to danger, then you will not have to sacrifice yourself to save her. Which means to say, not only will I not die, but so do everyone here as well - can everyone do that?"

Kra..... kra..... krakaka.....

A sharp cracking sound came from the metal wall that was over ten meters high.

The heavy metallic barrier was being eaten. Just by the crunching sounds, once can already deduce that there were not just tens, but hundreds of creatures pushing on the other side of the wall.

They were the Yuugenshu.

Despite facing such a terrifying scene that would have made anyone tremble in fear, the Priestess remained motionless.

"This will be the last. As the second Priestess; as the Barrier Priestess - I order you all."

Meimel lifted her hand up high.

In her hand was a ray of dazzling blue light - the clear brilliance of shinryoku.

"I chose to lead everyone into the battlefield because I trust all of you. So, please put your all into the battle, hold on till the very end, and survive. I do not wish to see any familiar faces missing from here. Therefore, I shall do my all to support everyone as well."

She just looked so strong, elegant and pretty.

The Priestess who is protecting the floating continent; who is filled with honor, dignity and love - she is standing right in front of my eyes.

..... It is really hard to deal with our Priestess.

Run brushed the corner of her lips, and tried to hide her wry smile.

"Everyone heard that? Just protecting our Priestess and the civilians is not enough! Aside from protecting everyone, we have to survive through this as well. That is our mission!"

She removed her ceremonial clothes, and tossed it high into the air-

That was the indication of the start of the battle.

"Everyone, show your spirit! Let's go!"

With that, the young female Sennenshi rushed out.

"—Smug bastards. Watch me smash every one of you up to the moon!"

And endless amount of Yuugenshu came swarming out of the broken wall, and filled up nearly all of their sights.

***

The collapsed stalls of the Star Festivals. The goods from the stalls were scattered onto the floor, which were then stomped to beyond

recognition by the escaping crowd. No one could be seen even on the main streets. What was left was the lonely scene of settling dust, with telling traces of the civilians who had all escaped.

—The Second Residential Area had been reduced to no-man's land, due to the majority of the civilians escaping to the shelters.

"Hurry up, move faster! The entrances to the shelters will be closed if we are late!"

The breathless Eyriey shouted.

The three-wheeled electric vehicle behind her roared in activation, and was ready to go off in an instant. On the back seats were clothes, food and medication, all enough for a couple of days. Those were all hurriedly scavenged from her room.

"Final check, Sheltis and Yuto have not forgotten anything right?"

"I am fine. So is Yuto."

Sheltis shook his head, while carrying Eyriey's computer.

"....."

He looked at the clock-tower on the street. At this time, the Yuugenshu must have already invaded the floating continent in full force. The guards of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> should had set up a line of defense at the living sector to engage the Yuugenshu.

..... But can they really hold out against the Yuugenshu?

..... According to the words of that Priestess named Meimel, wasn't the number of Yuugenshu in the hundreds?

It is impossible to fend off such a large number of Yuugenshu. The best they can do is to bid for time, so that the civilians in the living sector can escape to safety.

No, perhaps it would be asking too much of them to stall for time. As a threat, a single Yuugenshu is more than enough - but now there are over hundreds of them. Since they were those types that had breached past the barrier, they would be much stronger than the ordinary variants. At times like these, an extra man will be an additional help.

"Sheltis?"

Sheltis could only nod silently at Eyriey's call of concern.

"Shel-nii will protect me, right?"

..... What's wrong? That line had been echoing in my mind all these while.

The person who said that was waiting in front of the electric vehicle. There was no hidden meaning in Yuto's words. She had probably said it without thinking. Despite knowing that, there was still an asphyxiating pain deep in his heart.....

Suddenly, a huge shockwave came from the grounds.

Chapter 4

Groooooooo... The ground gave a deep rumble.

In the next instant, the loud sounds of heavy objects collapsing gushed onto them like an incoming tsunami.

"Could it be—!"

Sheltis turned around to look at the faraway Third Residential Sector.

A towering building of over ten stories high was gradually tumbling down in thick black smoke.

Building around it were collapsing in a similar fashion as well. Even though they were reinforced with ceramic and have an excellent resistance against acidity, the buildings could not withstand the corrosion of the mateki, and were gradually melting into a poll of viscid liquid.

"Crap, they were already-"

Eyriey froze halfway into her sentence.

Above the Third Residential Sector, were dark purple mist that are floating along with the winds.

"That is not mist..... Those black dot-like particles, they are all Yuugenshu?"

A huge amount of Yuugenshu had swarmed the sky pitch black. Though the winged variants are rare, Yuugenshu themselves do have

the ability to change their bodies into a mist-like state. Right now, the winds were blowing in the direction of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. All the Yuugenshu need to do was to ride along the winds, and they can easily get themselves within striking distance of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

"..... Shel-nii, I am scared."

Unknowingly, Yuto was already hugging on Sheltis' leg tightly. She shifted her sight in an attempt to look away from the frightening beasts, and was trembling in fear. Her feelings were conveyed to him clearly.

"ー ー ー"

The flying bodies in the sky paid no notice to the Second Living Sector. These strange beasts had only one target, and that is the huge white tower.

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, the place that maintains Hyouketsu Kyoukai. The Yuugenshu were heading in that direction.

..... That's right.

After slowly heaving out a breathe of air, Sheltis closed his eyes.

"Of course you will be scared....."

Everyone is the same. Including the Queen, the Priestesses, and the Sennenshi - there is no one who is not afraid of that strange existence. In fact, everyone will want to run away.

However, despite all that.....

"Ymy, she..... will definitely not run away."

The Priestesses will never run away. That is because, their mission is to protect Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> until the very last moment.

Leon too. That man will never cower. As long as the Priestesses are still in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, the Sennenshi will put their lives on the line to protect them.

..... The promise of that day was just that.

"Since Ymy wishes to become a Priestess to protect me, then I shall become a Sennenshi that protects Ymy. If so, we will be able to be together, right?"

"....."

"So stop crying, alright? Don't worry. I will definitely head to Ymy's side, to the peak of the tower."

— He had always worked hard to fulfill that promise.

The reason for him being that persistent in his dual swords during his time at Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, was due to that.

He can only protect himself with a single sword. To protect his most important person, together with himself - due to him having decided on protecting two people at one go, he thus requires two swords.

"....."

Sheltis gently opened his tightly closed eyes.

..... Let's go.

"Sorry, for making you both so afraid. However-"

He tenderly stroked Yuto's hair.

"It is already fine. I will end everything."

With a smile, he then slowly turned his back to Eyriey and Yuto.

"Wait! Where are you going?"

"Eyriey and Yuto, you both should get to the shelters quickly. I am going to retrieve back the things that I had lost."

His dual swords, his friends, and his memories. And the most important thing of all - the promise between him and her.

He had abandoned everything in that tower two years ago.

— Let's get it all back.

"That's right. Exile? What bullshit is that."

Just because he was robbed of his right to be a guard of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>? Just because he was sentenced to eternal exile?

There was absolutely no need for him to be concerned about insignificant matters like that. Even with the mateki-contaminated body of his, there should still be some things that he can do.

"Why are you going alone? Get on the vehicle, quick!"

"Sorry. You can leave me alone. Go seek shelters first-"

"I don't mean it like that! You are going to Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> right? Then get on quick, I'll give you a ride."

For a moment, he could not comprehend what Eyriey was saying.

"—Eh?"

"It will be too slow if you are to run there. Come. Yuto, take the back seat."

Eyriey made Yuto sat at the back seat. She then fastened up the safety belts in a flash. Upon seeing that scene, Sheltis could not help but to be in doubt of his own eyes.

"What..... what the heck are you talking about! Watch carefully - those are the Yuugenshu that are heading there!? Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> at its current state is just way too dangerous for you both!"

"But, Sheltis is going there, right? I am scared, to be honest. However, I've decided to follow through. I had already prepared myself for such a possible scenario ever since you had requested my assistance in hacking into the systems of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>."

The young girl answered in a half joking tone.

"That..... It is indeed my fault for getting you involved in all these."

"Moreover, you will not make it in time if you are to run such a distance, right? Also, it will not be good if you are to waste your physical energy before even getting to Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. How's it? Just be a good boy and accept my offer."

The girl in overalls beckoned Sheltis, while putting on a calm smile.

"..... Thank you."

That was all he could muster.

"Alright, it's decided then! Let's go! Since everyone is at the shelters, the road shall be clear of obstacles. Let us speed our way to Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>!"

The metallic chassis gave a loud roar.

Amid the shrill sound of the wheels rubbing against the road, the three-wheeled vehicle flew like a bullet.

"..... Eyriey, when everything's over, I'll introduce Ymy to you. Please befriend her."

Chapter 4

"Ohhh! That's great!"

Come to think of it, it was not like he had gained nothing from his two years at the living sector. That's because he has came to know of a great friend who is willing to do crazy things like this along with him.

"..... That's why, Ymy. You must wait for me."

I will definitely reach the peak of the tower in time.

Final Chapter: The Touching Fingertips

The dark skies. The dark purple mist emitted from Yuugenshu were blocking off the rays of the sun. The surrounding vision were gradually getting obscured.

The visibility in darkness was reduced to below one meter, and it was spreading outwards.....

"Everyone, I'll be dispersing these mist. It will be slightly blinding."

Meimel's telepathy message rang in their minds.

In the next instant, a strong ray of light appeared above Run's head, it was so bright that Run could hardly open her eyes. After emitting blue light that was more brilliant than that of the sun, Meimel's large-scaled shinryoku barrier expanded outwards in a flash, thus dispelling the mist that were lingering above the skies.

Beneath the glittering rays of the sun, were tens of Yuugenshu. Their body size ranged from that of a small cat to a lion, and one could vaguely see the four limbs in their mist-like body. They were Yuugenshu that walk on land.

Oe/ Dia =U xeph cley, Di shela teo phes kaon
<■ ■, ■ ..... ■ ■, ■ ■ ■ , ... ■ ..... ■ ■>

The curse was changing into chilly and uncomfortable sound waves, that will cause decay to one's eardrums just by listening to it.

Mateki, the mysterious powers unique to Yuugenshu. However-

"Too slow!"

Kra. The sound of the road cracking from her steps.

Prior to the release of the purple lights of mateki, Run dashed into the group of Yuugenshu. Possessing superhuman reaction, nerves and muscles, Run's start to her sprint was already at a speed barely detectable by human eyes.

At the same time, the lights of mateki spread into the shape of a fan, with the possible intention of protecting the Yuugenshu.

..... A defensive barrier?

Clenching her shinryoku-filled fist, which was made possible via the ritual marks, Run slammed it into the light barrier created by mateki - however, her fist was repelled away. That was the repulsive effect created when shinryoku and mateki were to clash into each other.

"Stop hindering me—!"

Run let out a roar while riding on her unstoppable momentum.

She forced her repelled fist back, and broke the purple barrier. The fist blew away the mist of the Yuugenshu as well, and hit straight into the core in the middle.

The Yuugenshu gave a painful cry before it was destroyed.

"Is there no way to solve the problem of shinryoku and mateki repelling each other?"

She shook her hand, in order to relieve her numb arm.

Shinryoku and mateki are two opposing forces, and they repulses each other. Even if she is to attack with her shinryoku-filled fist, its power will decrease considerably from the repulsive effect of the mateki barriers created by the Yuugenshu.

"But Run. Thanks to that, the Priestesses are safe."

"..... I know."

Run's face cringed a little when Meimel pointed that out.

The same applies to both humans and Yuugenshu. If Meimel is to come under the attacks of Yuugenshu, her shinryoku will repels the mateki as well, resulting in a decreased in the strength of the attack.

— Meimel actually has the spare time to tsukkomi me.

Suppressing a bitter smile, Run felt a sense of relief.

"Then again..... Their target is still Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> huh?"

As Run had already destroyed over ten Yuugenshu, there were only a few remaining Yuugenshu left before them. However, the

troublesome thing is that the Yuugenshu were not targeting the humans at their current area. They were always look for opportunities to avoid the battle, and head straight to Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. Up till now, from what Run knows, there were already tens of Yuugenshu that had bypassed their defense line. She was in no mood to calculate the actual numbers.

— I can't let anymore through.

Run bit on her lips tightly, and took a leap. With the aid of the streetlights, she moved to an even higher position.

She destroyed two winged Yuugenshu with a single kick. She then allowed her body to fall, and swung her fist into the Yuugenshu which was directly below her. Within a short time span of only a few seconds, she had already destroyed three Yuugenshu.

"With that, I should be able to buy some more time—"

Just when she was about to wipe the sweat off her face, one of her subordinates suddenly gave a yell.

"Ah..... ah.....? ..... Ah..... Ahhhhhhhhh..... Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

It was neither a scream nor a cry before death, but a strange cry from insanity.

He swung his twin swords madly, without caring whether he could have slashed anyone in accident. One could see a faint deep purple mist enshrouding the back of his head.

"..... It's mind control!"

That is one of the abilities of mateki - the power to send the person that it has cursed into a state of panic. Even though it will not directly result in death, the effect is way worse than decay and poison in a hectic battlefield. That is especially so if the person cursed is a well trained soldier. Even if he was just slashing about wildly in confusion, he would still be posing a huge threat.

"I'll restrain him. Meimel, purify him while I do so!"

Even though that would result in some Yuugenshu breaking through the defensive line, such a curse would have to be removed as quickly as possible. Just as she was suppressing her anxiety, and was about to act against her subordinate—

"There is no time to be purifying right now."

A young man with tea-red colored hair appeared before her all of the sudden.

The surrounding members could not react to the sudden intruder. The young man easily dodged the slash from the swordsman of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, then slid past the swordsman's side to his back. He raised his hand—

—*Thud*

He gave a vicious chop at the back of the swordsman's neck. The swordsman collapsed on the spot, and fainted immediately.

"For mental control in battle, it is much more effective to just knock the cursed person out cold. Isn't it so?"

The young man gave a slight smile.

"Eh..... Ah..... Ahhh."

Regaining her senses, Run hurriedly nodded her head in agreement. Indeed, she could not be more familiar with the method used by the young man.

However, at the same time, she knew very well how difficult it is to knock out a swordsman of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> from his back. If it was not properly done, there is the chance of the executor getting injured by the swordsman instead.

As the commander, Run preferred the much safer option.

Then again, who is he?

He seemed to be extremely familiar with the attacking radius of the swordsman. After baiting the enemy's attack, he had skillfully avoided the slash with his clever movements. Aside from Sennenshi, how many people in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> can actually execute a move like that?

"Oi! You....."

Obviously, he was not an ordinary intruder. Who exactly is he?

Final Chapter

"— Well then, I'll leave things here to you!"

"Ah, wait! Don't leave!"

Ignoring the looks from the surroundings, the young man turned around and escaped. There was a huge electric vehicle waiting in the direction that he was running to, which obviously looked like it had been illegally modified.

"Sheltis! What are you doing? Now is not the time to complicate matters!"

— Sheltis?

The name which the girl in overalls had called out sounded very familiar to Run. It was a name which she had heard of not too long ago.

"Sheltis is my childhood friend."

"Could it be..... Oi, are you Ymy's—!"

Just as Run was about to stretch out her hands, the modified vehicle had already gave a roar from its activation.

..... Could that person be the one who had fallen into Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>—

***

"Sh—el—tis—? Can you please tell me if you are planning to go or stay?"

After nodding to a unhappy Eyriey, Sheltis jumped back into the vehicle.

"Sorry, I just want to obtain a weapon before reaching Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>."

A pair of thin swords that was kept in a white sheath - Sheltis took the opportunity to borrow it after the swordsman had fainted from his attack.

"Whoa! Right after the illegal intrusion, you have committed yet another crime of stealing. Sheltis is becoming more and more of a criminal!"

"..... I'll return it back to him later. Ah, I won't be needing the sheath."

While sitting in the galloping vehicle, Sheltis threw the sheath out. What was left were the frozen blades bathed in azure light - it was a pair of swords made from Hyouketsu Kyoukai, and both carried strong shinryoku in them.

"Oh, how beautiful. Just like a crystal. Do all guards of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> use weapons like this as well?"

"Generally. Since weapons will not possess any destructive powers against Yuugenshu, if they do not contain shinryoku."

He held the blade under the sun, and the mirror-like blade reflected the surrounding landscape - a black dot appeared in the azure scene.

"Eyriey, turn left!"

"Ah?"

"Don't ask, just turn the vehicle to the left!"

The vehicle spun leftwards with a skid. Just as the wheels were giving off a sharp screeching sound, the walls to the house on their right collapsed suddenly.

Grrr..... rrr.....

A strange-looking beast emerged from the decaying walls.

"Eyriey, maintain the current speed! Just keep going straight, no matter what happens!"

"B-But, it is chasing us!"

"Just do as I say!"

The monster chased them with a terrifying speed. It gradually caught up with the vehicle that was going at speeds of two hundred kilometers per hour. It leaped upwards with its weird limbs, with the intention of crushing the vehicle from above - at the same time, Sheltis jumped up from the vehicle as well.

The silhouettes of the mist beast and the young man overlapped, and—

..... Rinnnnnn..... inn.....

Final Chapter

The sounds of a bell. A ringing sound, beautiful enough to make one nearly forget about the current situation, rang throughout the street. Above them, was the mist beast hanging in mid air, with its crystal core destroyed.

"That's dangerous. These Yuugenshu are indeed elusive."

While listening to the melody of the breaking crystal core of the Yuugenshu, Sheltis landed back into the backseat of the galloping vehicle.

"..... You have defeated it?"

"Mmm. But this is just the beginning. Those that are attacking Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> will be even stronger."

The difference in strength between each individual Yuugenshu is huge, even if they look roughly the same. Some possesses mateki that is more than ten times stronger than your average Yuugenshu. One can only gauge their strength after having engaged with them.

— The real fight starts from there on.

The sharp white tower. A huge gate before its grounds came into their sight.

"Alright, we are breaking through!"

After breaking through the unguarded front gates, the three-wheeled vehicle sprinted on the grass turf.

Final Chapter

The turf had already turned black, while the defensive and outer walls of the tower were already melted. Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> coming under the attacks of Yuugenshu is already an indisputable fact. They have no idea how many Yuugenshu had infiltrated into the tower currently. Not a single person was in sight - as a precautionary measure, all staff except for the guards should have already escaped to the shelters.

"Where are we going now? Are we going to enter the first floor via the main door?"

"Can't. There should be a line of defense set up there."

The first floor is a wide foyer, which should be one of the most efficient places to engage the infiltrating Yuugenshu. An impregnable line of defense should be there already.

"Eyriey, turn right at the next forked road! Circle the exteriors of the tower!"

"Roger!"

The vehicle started to speed around the huge tower, which had nearly occupied all of their sight.

The tower is a gigantic building with a diameter of over a few hundred meters wide. The journey seems to be never-ending, as they traveled along the curved walls.

"Alright, destination? Since we are not entering via the main door, what is left are the side doors by the two sides?"

"Mhmm..... Ah, there's a red door over there! Stop the vehicle there."

A door which opened by parting both ways from its center was installed at the side of the tower. Different from the main door, which were shining in grandness under the lights, this was a heavy metallic door which was painted bright red.

"Hopefully, the password is still the same as before....."

Standing in front of the electronic screen next to the door, Sheltis began to key in a complicated password consisting of more than ten characters. The electrically locked door then began to open slowly from both sides.

"Oh- this should be a lift, right? The walls look pretty sturdy."

Eyriey took a knock at the the vertical walls, and listened closely to the sounds. It was a space enclosed by four walls. Aside from the pale colored carpet beneath them, all the other walls was of cold metallic color.

"A mechanical sound like that..... Could this be a catapult?"

"Yes, it is a type of mechanical cannon, which is said to be able to fire objects weighing over hundreds of kilograms to the foyer located at the two hundred and fortieth story. Though it is not designed to carry human passengers, now is not the time for us to be caring about things like that."

He turned his body, and the door in front of heavy metallic door in front of him closed once again.

— There is no turning back.

They could only depend on themselves, during the journey to the two hundred and fortieth story.

"This is indeed a most convenient shortcut. So we are to be fired upwards like a rocket..... Yuto, grab onto the hand rails tightly. It will be dangerous."

Eyriey extended her hand, and grabbed onto the lever that controls the firing mechanism of the catapult. Next to her, was Yuto, whose whole body was hugging onto the hand rails tightly.

"Sheltis, here we go?"

While holding onto the twin swords that were giving off an azure shine, Sheltis looked upwards. At a place beyond the ceilings, located at the highest story two thousand meters off the grounds into the sky, 'she' is right there waiting for him.

"Eyriey, fire."

And so, I'll just go upwards.

To take back all the things that I had left in this tower two years ago.

A black shadow streaked past his sight.

Leon jumped up instinctively before he could even figure out what that was. In the next instant, the collar of his coat was ripped apart, with its surrounding fibers decaying as though it had melted.

Grr..... rr.....

The mist monster were slowly advancing on him while giving off a strange sound from its mouth. Its sludge-colored limbs made a strange leap, and the grotesque claws at the ends came closing in. At the same time, Leon's great sword sliced through the body of the Yuugenshu, along with its claws.

The crystal core was smashed, and the body of Yuugenshu disappeared.

Before he could even catch a breath, crystal-machine <Ilis> hanging in front of his chest gave a shout.

"Leon, behind you!"

The shiny blade of the sword had captured the scene behind his back. There was another Yuugenshu at an uncomfortably close distance behind him.

"Che!"

He spun his body with all his might.

However, he saw no deep-purple beast behind him. The only traces left were the smoke given off by the floor, which had corroded due to the Yuugenshu.

Is it above?

"Above you!"

Before his brain had even processed the warning given off by Ilis, Leon already gripped onto his great sword tightly with his hands.

"— Ha!"

The great sword is as long as his height. Despite that, he easily lifted the sword, which is heavier, more destructive, and out-speccing just about every other weapons available. The blade shimmering in azure light swept past his head.

klang!

The mateki-filled claws clashed together with the shinryoku-filled great sword.

Leon chopped off the claws of the opponent in a single slash, and pounced straight at the Yuugenshu's body - however, the Yuugenshu's body shone purple, and a light barrier was erected in front of it.

A repulsion effect occurred between the shinryoku-filled sword and the barriers of the Yuugenshu. The blade was repelled back.

"Leon, the barrier of the opponent is very strong. My analysis says it will be difficult to break through the mateki-barrier in a single shot. I

recommend to attack it multiple times, so that you can split the destruction of the barrier into various phases."

"There is no time to be doing that.....!"

Leon clenched his teeth tightly, and stomped hard on the ground. Ignoring the croaking sounds given off by the muscles of his shoulders, he swung his blade yet again.

The barrier shattered like glass. The Yuugenshu was busy regenerating its claws behind it, but before it could react in time, the great sword had already pierced through the core in the center.

"How should I put it..... Your strength is really astounding."

"Every second is precious now. I don't have a choice."

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, two hundred and forty-first story, foyer.

Aside from the two Priestesses tasked with protecting the Grand Holy Hall, that place is the final line of defense. However, the situation of that floor was not looking good either. The people infected by mateki were lying in the corners of the room, waiting to be treated. The guards were barely standing up, and were more or less injured. Everyone on that floor were busy fighting with the Yuugenshu. None of them could spare any time to listen to Leon's commands.

"Syun-rei, Ymy..... I am sorry, please take care of it."

He firmly believed that he himself could stop a majority of the enemies, but it is an undeniable fact that there were still plenty of Yuugenshu that had managed to break through the defense line.

"Sennenshi Leon, the line of defense on the first floor of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> has been breached yet again! Over twenty Yuugenshu are heading upwards via the elevator shaft!"

— There was just no ends to it. After hearing the hasty report, a taste of bitterness spread in Leon's mouth.

Yuugenshu were constantly appearing from below, like the endless waves of tide. Not only do they arrive in huge numbers, but since they were able to bypass the line of defense on the first floor, they were all individuals which possesses strong mateki as well.

"How's the damage status on the first floor?"

"Over ten people are infected with mateki, as for the injured..... countless."

"Send a few of the apprentice-Priestesses over. They will die if the purification of mateki is to be administered too late."

"But, the apprentice-Priestesses of this floor are all exhausted as well....."

"Just the minimum amount will do! At least one of them must know the arts of purification!"

He roared in reply, and hurried back to the center area of that story.

..... Things were in a really bad state.

In order not to let his subordinates around him sense it, Leon feigned a calm expression.

There were originally about a hundred outstanding subordinates here, but as of now, most of them were suffering from injuries. As for the apprentice-Priestesses who were in charge of purifying the mateki-infected people, their energy were burning at a shockingly fast rate.

The sweat at his forehead flowed into his eyes - just then, crystal-machine <Ilis> glowed.

"Reporting. The observation units of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> has detected a huge reading of mateki, one thousand three hundred meters below Orbie Clar. It is a large flying-type Yuugenshu, and its size is roughly the same as a small dragon. The analysis suggest that it is the commanding body of this assault."

"..... The commander?"

Yuugenshu usually acts individually. There are occasions when they will move in a small group, but up until now, they have never heard of a commanding Yuugenshu.

"From this assault of the Yuugenshu, we can see that there is a consistent modus operandi between all of them - which is to lock their sights on the Priestesses and Queen of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. Adding on them realizing the weakness of Hyouketsu Kyoukai and using it to break past the barrier, plus the fact that they are attacking

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> as a strong group. All of these suggests that there is a strong commanding presence behind these actions."

"And it is that thing?"

"I think that should be it."

In their current fatigued state where they were all barely holding on, there was an even stronger presence lurking behind the scenes.

— What should they do?

For such a strong commanding Yuugenshu, there is probably only him left in the tower, who can fight against it.

However, as a Sennenshi, he is the commander of the two hundred and forty-first story as well. Seeing how the mental state of his subordinates were nearing their limits, they would probably not be able to hold on should the commander be absent from the battlefield.

"If only there is someone here who has the abilities of a Sennenshi....."

Despite knowing that to be an extravagant wish, his heart could not help but to yearn for it. That's right, if only his only best friend - the idiot who will never admit defeat, is still around—

"..... Haa, I have actually said such depressing things?"

Heaving a deep sigh, he reprimanded himself for being that weak inside. As of now, he should only focus on coming up with a plan to overcome the deadlock. He should not be thinking about the

commanding Yuugenshu either. At the very least, he should be dealing with the swarming Yuugenshu first, before anything else.

"Second wave's incoming."

At the same time when Ilis was saying that, the four corners of the floor were dyed pitch black. After coming into contact with mateki, the walls were slowly decaying and peeling off bit by bit.

"The enemies are coming, not a single one of them are to pass us!"

The walls of the story collapsed in succession, and the monsters in deep purple mist appeared together. The surrounding guards held their breaths. In front of them, were Yuugenshu, their numbers large enough to be covering the whole wall. There were just too many of them.

Everyone at the scene dared not move.

"Leon, there is a reading of another Yuugenshu approaching this floor. And it is a very strong reading."

"Is it that commanding Yuugenshu?"

Damn. If the commanding Yuugenshu is to appear at the same time—

"No, that's not it..... it's not the same Yuugenshu..... but, this—"

"Ilis?"

It was the first time Leon had seen crystal-machine <Ilis> stuttering.

"What's with this..... it is a reading of mateki, but it is not a Yuugenshu that is coming up..... Even I am not sure what this is..... But there is a sort of..... nostalgic feeling."

Nostalgic?

Before Leon had the time to consider the meaning of that word, the Yuugenshu began to close in on them—

Just then, the approaching Yuugenshu were blown away, as though they were hit by an explosion,

"Wha.....!"

Leon's eyes widened from the scene before him.

Deep in the deep purple glow of mateki - inside the strong shine of the cursed rays that will corrode human beings, all life, and just about anything in the floating continent, there was a blinding flash from a sword.

For the Yuugenshu that were blasted into the air, their mateki barriers were gradually breaking apart. In the end, even their cores were crushed as well. Their bodies then dispersed into thin air.

The floor regained its silence.

The surrounding guards, including crystal-machine <Ilis>, could not speak a single word. It was then—

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"Yo, Leon. It's been a while."

Despite being in the poisonous rays of light, the young man, who was holding onto a pair of swords, waved his hand and greeted Leon nonchalantly.

His messy tea-red colored hair, with an androgynous face. He was wearing the old ceremonial clothes of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> on his slim body - he is someone who Leon is familiar with, more than anyone else.

"..... You—"

And he understood, the reason that caused the nostalgia in Ilis.

Nothing has changed. Be it the shy yet mischievous expression of his, or the general feel that he gives.

"..... You bastard."

A warm sensation flowed out of his heart. His originally withering soul was once again burning up.

Why was that so? He just felt like swearing at Sheltis upon seeing him..... No, that should be fine. He has been sharing a close and harmonious friendship with Sheltis since a long time ago.

"Hmm? Could it be that Leon is on the brink of collapse?"

"You..... who do you think is the person responsible for the state that I am in?"

In reply to the provocative smile which the young man was showing him, Leon gave the same smile as well.

Speaking of which, Leon had nearly forgotten how to smile like that. It was not an expression of superiority as a Sennenshi, but a smile that he could show to someone who stands equal before him - a person whom he can speak freely to—

"You have returned too late, Sheltis!"

After leaving Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> for two years, his only best friend was standing right in front of him again.

"..... Mmm. I've caused lots of trouble for you guys. I am really sorry."

"It's fine. But, you'll have to pay that back twofold, together with your tardiness as well!"

Leon took off the necklace with crystal-machine <Ilis>, and tossed it to Sheltis.

"Go quickly! The two hundred and eighty-first story - both Ymy and my Priestess are in the Grand Holy Hall!"

"..... Is this really fine?"

Looking at the young man, who was putting on an expression of shock, Leon stretched out his hands to instruct the people around him.

"I have to stay here to command them! You will have to think of something! Don't be telling me that your skills have declined drastically!"

"— Thanks, Leon."

Just when Leon was about to urge him to get going.

"Oh right, I'll leave the two girls here in your care."

"What?"

He looked in the direction where Sheltis was pointing to.

"..... Ughhhhh..... I..... I will never ride on a catapult ever again..... ugh....."

"Eyri-nee, are you carsick?"

What he could see, was a teenage girl in overalls who was suffering from dizziness, and a small girl looking on with a concerned look.

..... What the hell? Ain't those two civilians?

"In any case, I'll leave these two to you!"

"Oi, hold on a second! What's with these two girls?"

However, the young man was already sprinting towards the direction of the emergency stairs.

"..... That fella, he always tossing the troublesome stuff onto others."

Leon gave a long sigh. He then lifted his head once again—

"Whatever. I am used to that personality of his since a long time back."

On the face of the silver haired Sennenshi, were a pair of eyes filled with a strong will. With his confusion and hesitation swept cleanly aside, his eyes were as clear as that of an innocent child.

"Everyone listen up! There are two civilians here. As the guards of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, we cannot allow them to come under any harm!"

He had remembered. He remembered the days when he was burning with passion.

Those days where he had wholeheartedly wished to become a Sennenshi, and swore that he will be the one protecting the Priestesses. The days of Sheltis, Ymy and himself. The days where the three of them were to look at Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, with the same aim of reaching the highest point of the tower.

— The three people back then were finally reunited together once more.

"Don't worry about me. You just have to worry about Ymy, and go all the way up to her."

Locking on to the Yuugenshu at the walls, Leon ran towards them with the great sword in his hands.

***

"The Grand Holy Hall huh....."

Sheltis was sprinting up the emergency stairs, which began from the two hundred and forty-first story.

The Grand Holy Hall located on the two hundred and eighty-first story of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> - the whole floor is not just a bethel, but it is also the biggest holy hall in the tower. Ymy and Leon's Priestess were both there waiting, and the two formed the last line of defense against the Yuugenshu.

There was already not much time left. The most important thing now is—

"Ilis? Can you hear me, Ilis?"

He called out to crystal-machine <Ilis> that was hanging off on the necklace in front of his chest. He had obtained crystal-machine <Ilis> from Leon earlier, but since then, it had lost its glow, and was not giving off any sort of reaction.

Weird. Since Leon was wearing it, it should mean that crystal-machine <Ilis> is functioning properly.

"Are you still angry at me for dumping you? I apologize, so please say something. I have never been here before, so I have no idea where to go."

There was no response, which only caused Sheltis to get more and more anxious. The him of two years ago, had only traveled up to the two hundred and seventieth story. To reach the two hundred and eighty-first story, he will need someone to give him the directions.

"Urm..... I am in desperate need of some advice from the outstanding Ilis?"

"....."

"The world's smartest and cutest Miss Ilis, can you please help me out?"

"....."

"Ugh..... You are perfect..... and outstanding..... and..... Ahhhhhh, how frustrating!"

Sheltis could no longer stand the unnatural silence. He removed the necklace from his neck, and directly grabbed the blue crystal-machine <Ilis>.

"Listen up—— Wake up, you piece of junk!"

That was all he had said. But what happened next—

".....Who..... W-W-Who..... W-Who....."

A bright glow was emitted from the center of crystal-machine <Ilis>.

"Who are you calling a piece of jun~~~k! Sheltis you meanie!"

"Ah, that's great. So you are not broken."

"..... How terrible. You are calling me a junk just because I did not say anything for seventeen seconds."

With a sound effect akin to a sigh, the artificial intelligence continued on endlessly.

"Also, I have plenty of things to say to Sheltis as well. What's the meaning of dumping me all by myself? And for a whole of two years? There was not a single word from you after that. Do you still consider yourself to be my holder?"

"I apologize for that. However, I do have my own circumstances as well."

"I know that. Even so, in a situation like this, the guy should be the one who takes the initiative and apologize! Listen up, Sheltis. To dump and ignore a delicate and fragile machine such as myself—"

"..... I know, I know. I am at fault, for leaving you here by yourself."

Just then, the originally furious Ilis went silent all of the sudden.

Her originally angry tone was replaced with a rather gentle voice.

"You will have to apologize to Ymy too, alright?"

Just that.

However, what came next was a heart-wrenching pain. It was more far-reaching than any of the scoldings Ilis could have said.

"Ymy has been waiting for you all this time. Because she firmly believes that you will be back some day. Even when you are not around, she has continued to do her best in the discipline of a Priestess."

"..... Mmm."

"Are you reflecting on it?"

It was as though Ilis was reprimanding him.

Grabbing hold of crystal-machine <Ilis> tightly, Sheltis nodded his head strongly.

"I am reflecting on it. That is the truth."

"..... Fufu."

"What's with that laugh of yours?"

"No no. I just like that straightforward personality of yours. Therefore—"

The crystal-machine <Ilis> on the necklace was shining with an even brighter glow.

"From now onward, Ilis shall once again acknowledge Sheltis Magna Yehle as my holder, and will do my best to assist him."

—Krinnnng—

In the blink of an eye, the twin swords in his hand gave a clear sound, and the blades shattered.

"The twin swords that you were using is probably borrowed from someone, right? I'll be reconstructing the blade now, so as to match your frame and your strength."

A silver line began extending outwards from the hilt of the sword, which was now devoid of any blade. Azure frozen crystals began to form over the line, and they gradually turned into the new blades of the sword. A pair of sharp double-edged thin swords - it was the shape of the sword which he was using three years ago.

"Fixing a silver monad as the core, and encasing its surrounding with a layer of azure crystals of Hyouketsu Kyoukai. Its limit to destruction is set to be at sevenfold. These are the settings similar to that of three years ago. How's it?" [TLNote: The monad thing refers to Monadology. Click on link to wiki page for more info if interested.]

"..... It's longer than before?"

The blade which used to be just right for his size when he was fourteen, had lengthened as well to match his current height.

"I had calculated the distance of your steps from the vibrations detected as you were running up the stairs. After comparing to those recorded when you were fourteen, I've managed to obtain your current height. At the same time, I've measured the strength of your grip as well, and deduced your current strength, based on the data when you were fourteen years-old."

When did she do all that?

The question in his mind was answered easily without much thoughts. There was no response from Ilis just now, no matter how he called out to her. So it was then—

"I was busy obtaining the data and comparing them..... That can be considered to be a sort of assistance, you know."

Ilis said with a rather embarrassed tone.

"Just to confirm, are we heading towards the Grand Holy Hall?"

"Before that, I wish to go somewhere else first."

It is a definite must to reach the Grand Holy Hall before it comes under the attack of the Yuugenshu. However, there is something else that need to be done before that.

"The levels above us are under the attack of Yuugenshu as well, right?"

"You are saying that you want to destroy all Yuugenshu at every floor, and reach the Grand Holy Hall before the commanding Yuugenshu does? To be frank, that is impossible, with the amount of time you have in your hands."

The emotionless mechanized voice replied calmly.

"..... But, there is no one else aside from me."

The members of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> had set up the first line of defense at level one. Leon's commanding the second line of defense, and are repelling the Yuugenshu at the two hundred and forty-first story. As for the two Priestesses, they are the last line of defense, and are guarding the two hundred and eighty-first story with all their might.

— If so, who will be protecting the levels in between?

"This is the flight of emergency stairs at two hundred and fifty-fifth story, while Ymy's at two hundred and eighty-first story. What will become of the levels in between? Those who did not manage to escape may come under the attacks of the Yuugenshu."

"Yes. However, should the Queen's Hyouketsu Kyoukai collapse, then the whole floating continent will be finished."

She's right. Everyone knows that.

The Queen can only maintain Hyouketsu Kyoukai for a maximum of an hour more. They will have to defeat the commanding Yuugenshu,

and allow the Queen to pass control of Hyouketsu Kyoukai to the Priestesses.

"Each and every one of these Yuugenshu is extremely strong. If you are to fight against them head on, even though you will most probably not lose, it will still take you a long time to destroy them. The worst situation will be the the commanding Yuugenshu infiltrating into the Grand Holy Hall while we are dragged down by other Yuugenshu."

"If so, I'll just have to mount a lightning quick offense."

"What do you mean?"

The memory crystal asked in doubt.

"..... Three years ago, I had fallen into Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>, causing the shinryoku in my body to disappear, only to be replaced by mateki - ever since I was forced out of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, I had been thinking all this time."

He is the sole person in the floating continent to have survived the ordeal of falling into Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>. However, the price of survival, is that mateki from Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden> has occupied his whole body.

"Upon thinking that I will never get to see Ymy again, my initial first year was filled with darkness, and I had barely any will to move on. I thought that no one will need me anymore. But as of now—"

He suddenly reverse-gripped his swords, and turned around. The white wall behind him was stained by darkness. Pores grew, and the wall was decaying fast.

"I have already decided. Even if I have to drag this cursed body of mine along, I will redo everything all over again."

The walls crumbled, and deep purple mist was given off from within.

"I've detected the readings of two Yuugenshu, and they are coming from the wall behind you!"

The two Yuugenshu crunched off the walls, and got into the passageway from inside the room. The beasts looked like lions shrouded in deep purple mist, and they both pounced at Sheltis at the same time.

"Sheltis, evade them immediately!"

Sheltis ignored Ilis, and instead dashed towards the Yuugenshu in front of him.

— I can definitely do it.

He parried away the sharp claws which were coming from above his head with the sword in his right hand, and while grazing past the Yuugenshu he followed up with a slash from the sword in his left. That single slash was all it took for the Yuugenshu to vaporize into thin air.

"Just a single hit to destroy the barrier?"

The usually calm crystal-machine <Ilis> exclaimed in surprise.

In the battle between humans and Yuugenshu, a repulsion phenomenon will occur when mateki and shinryoku comes into contact with each other - similar to the poles of a magnet repelling each other. Due to the phenomenon, when a Yuugenshu activates its mateki barrier, the power of the shinryoku-filled bullets or swords will be reduced significantly. That is one of the reason why it is difficult to destroy a Yuugenshu.

However, Sheltis's swords had totally ignored the barriers of the Yuugenshu, and instead struck the Yuugenshu directly.

"Sheltis, could it be, you....."

The azure blades are still constructed out of the azure crystals of Hyouketsu Kyoukai. However, due to mateki flowing within the swords in Sheltis' hands, the blades were giving off a violet glow.

Shinryoku will evoke a repulsion. However, if it is changed to mateki, then it will no longer be repelled.

Only Sheltis, who has mateki in his body, is able to bypass the barriers of Yuugenshu, which possesses the same properties.

Oe/ Dia =U xeph cley, Di shela teo phes kaon
<■ ■, ■ ..... ■ ■, ■ ■ ■ , ... ■ ..... ■ ■>

The body of the other Yuugenshu began to tremble, and it released a curse-like sound. That is the curse which the Yuugenshu possess, filled with the powers of Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>. The reason it is called 'mateki', is due to these sounds.

Decay, poison, coma and brainwashing. There are various ways it can cause harm to anything that exists on the floating continent. One will never know what's the specific effects without experiencing it himself.

The deep purple lights had engulfed Sheltis.....

"Sheltis, escape quickly!"

"— No need for that."

He turned his body immediately, and swung his wrists alone with the momentum. He sliced horizontally at supersonic speed.

There was not a single sound of moving air. All that could be seen was a quiet slash of the sword in a blink of an eye. The mateki, which had a distorted sound and glow, was cleaved away by Sheltis' sword.

The mateki produced by the Yuugenshu had totally vanished.

Before the Yuugenshu could recover from that, Sheltis had already sprang above the Yuugenshu. He jumped off the horizontal walls of the passageway to step on the ceilings. Using it as a leverage, he dived at the enemy below him.

—Kin

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A clean sound of dismemberment.

As the sound rang, the remaining Yuugenshu had already stopped moving. Its body gave a brief tremble, before bursting into tiny pieces with a dry sound.

"..... I have finally understood the reason for your confidence just now."

Ilis continued on softly with an extremely serious tone.

"Up till now, there has never been a case of a human carrying mateki in him, but 'negating Yuugenshu's mateki with your own mateki' huh..... I see. Perhaps I should say you are lucky? In the case of fighting against Yuugenshu, the current you do possess a power that severely topples the balance of the game. However—"

After a slight pause, Ilis said,

"Sheltis. Do not forget, that can put you in great danger as well."

Since he is carrying mateki in him, he has the ability to render the barriers of the Yuugenshu useless. But at the same time, it means that he is exposing himself under the attacks of the Yuugenshu without any form of protection. If the neck is attacked by the fangs of the Yuugenshu, a Priestess can use the shinryoku within her to form a barrier, thus lowing the damage done to nothing more than a scratch. However, since Sheltis lacks the shinryoku to protect himself, the result could very well be his artery getting severed from the attack.

— Any hit suffered will be a fatal one.

In the upcoming battles with the Yuugenshu, the harsh conditions will carry on forever.

"No problem. I'll just have to do the pre-emptive strike."

"What a simpleton..... is what I would love to say, but according to the data gathered, there is credibility to what you have said."

Since he can attack without having to worry about the barriers of the Yuugenshu, he is thus able to defeat them in the shortest amount of time. Even if he is to clear away the Yuugenshu that are to be found all over Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, he will still be able to make it in time before the commanding Yuugenshu arrives.

"I'll remind you again. If you are to suffer from an attack from the Yuugenshu, you will not be able to avoid the fatal blow. If you are to continue fighting against the Yuugenshu before the arrival of the commanding Yuugenshu, the possibility of that happening will increase greatly..... Despite all that, are you still going to do it?"

"Of course. I am here just for that."

A short moment of silence. Crystal-machine <Ilis> then gave a flash, of what seems to be her agreeing to it.

"..... Understood. Well then, I'll do my best to assist you."

"Thank you. I have faith in your abilities."

"What a headache, to have an owner who abuses machines."

The memory machine gave a sigh, and its colors gradually became fiery red.

"The space required for the locating of Yuugenshu, confirmed and completed..... Beginning the synthesis of 'Second Hypothesis World', and the sub-interface shall be set as 'rainbow colors'. Along with 'Crystal Language', program release..... Reporting. Currently, I am able to capture the locations of all Yuugenshu that is within a radius of ten thousand meters away from me."

"That's more than enough."

"Analyzing the location of the commanding Yuugenshu..... position captured. It is currently at the Third Residential Sector, and flying towards our direction. It is gradually rising from the current low altitudes of a hundred meters. Taking into account its flying speed, the estimated time of its arrival at Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, is only fourteen minutes."

Fourteen minutes. He would have to destroy all the Yuugenshu in the various levels, and reach the Grand Holy Hall within that period of time.

It was a race against time.

"Understood. Please lead the way."

"It is a great honor to be able to assist you. Sheltis, please be careful."

Holding on to the twin swords which he used in the past—

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Sheltis sprinted towards the peak of the tower.

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, two hundred and eighty-first story - the Grand Holy Hall.

The whole floor is a sacred praying hall, which is used by the Priestesses as a place to train and pray.

"_ _"

On the quiet altar, the black haired Priestess was praying with her hands clasped together. A pale azure glow was expanding from the young girl's surroundings. The dots of lights were gradually seeping into the interiors of the Grand Holy Hall.

Black stains began to appear on the brass floors next to the feet of the girl. The originally tiny stains of black dots increased in size gradually. Dark purple mist flowed in from the pores.

Just then, Ymy released the spells that she had been accumulating.

ele So Phi-a-s Arma-Riris
<Please accept all wishes that I can grant...>

Shaaaaaaa..... A spiraling barrier of red light covered the floors of the Grand Holy Hall, wiping clean the emerging Yuugenshu and their barriers together. That was baptism spell from the arts of shinryoku, used to purify mateki.

"..... Thank you."

Syun-rei opened her eyes and smiled gently.

"..... It's fine now, Ymy. The door has been activated."

She pointed to the only route to the highest level - the Sacred Door of the Grand Holy Hall. It is extremely sturdy. The solemnly crafted door is shimmering under the glow of the blue rays of shinryoku.

— The door was covered with an anti-Yuugenshu barrier.

As the place was used as the training ground for Priestesses, due to the long term usage for a thousand years, it had naturally came to possess the shinryoku of the Priestesses as well. Among other things, the Sacred Door's powers of shinryoku is the greatest, making it a sanctuary-class barrier strong enough to withstand all mateki thrown at it.

Syun-rei had originally thought that the powers of the door would vanish along with the breach of Hyouketsu Kyoukai. However, it had been confirmed that the door had regained its powers, along with the repairing of Hyouketsu Kyoukai.

"Next..... is the walls over here."

It is almost certain that the crucial door will no longer fall under any invasion. However, even though the floor is filled with shinryoku, there are still places that are weaker than the rest of the areas - in this case, it is the outer walls and the floors beneath them. The flying type

Yuugenshu would be able to chew off the outer walls, while the floors beneath them can be penetrated like what had happened just now. All Yuugenshu that can reach there are variants that contains strong mateki in them. There was no room for carelessness.

"..... How very quiet."

The room was filled with an awkward silence. That was perhaps the usual atmosphere of the grand hall, but the usual silence which they should have used to, chilled their spines instead in their current situation.

"..... Leon."

Syun-rei muttered the name of the Sennenshi who was battling various floors beneath her. It was either due to her worrying about his safety, or her feeling uneasy from being separated - no, it was most probably due to both reasons.

"Don't worry, Syun-rei. I know very well about Leon's capabilities!"

Ymy gave a slight smile while patting on the shoulders of the girl, who had her head lowered.

She has already known Leon for over ten years. That silver haired young man has been competitive and strong ever since she knew him. She knew that better than anyone else in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

Run and Meimel too. Everyone will be fine.

"Cheer up, okay? Since we are the last line of defense."

"..... Mmm, I'll do my best—"

Just as she was lifting her head up, Syun-rei stopped moving all of the sudden.

A drop of sweat streaked past Syun-rei's cheek, and dripped off her chin. Her black pupils turned light blue, a trait that signifies that she was currently using her powers of far-sight.

"..... It's a very strong mateki. It's flying..... and getting close."

***

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, two hundred and seventy-sixth story, the floor of religious training for the Priestesses.

"At the right of the next junction. There's one thirty meters away, heading towards us."

At the same time when crystal-machine <Ilis> had sounded her warnings, a gigantic Yuugenshu crawled into sight from the junction. Its huge body filled up the passageway, which could have easily accommodate multiple adults walking shoulder-to-shoulder at the same time.

— He could no longer evade sideways.

Two clawed front limbs suddenly appeared from within the mist that was covering its body.

Dodging the incoming limbs, Sheltis jumped into the air. He gave the chandelier in the ceiling a kick, resulting in countless glass shards raining on the head of the enemy. The Yuugenshu was distracted by the falling objects from above its head, and its movements slowed down just a little.

—Kin!

That brief window of opportunity had been locked on by the pair of violet colored swords.

After breaking through the erected mateki barrier, the twin swords crushed the Yuugenshu, along with its core, at the same time.

"..... With that, this floor should be done."

The Yuugenshu gradually disappeared with a sharp sound of shattering. Not pausing to witness the scene, Sheltis changed his direction immediately, and ran towards the emergency stairs located at about ten meters straight ahead of him.

"Sheltis, listen to me while you run."

"Hmm?"

"We are currently heading upwards at a really fast pace. You can say that it has surpassed my predicted speed. However, that is due to you straining yourself. I must warn you, that your breathing is slowly becoming irregular."

The crystal-machine <Ilis> informed him composedly.

"Your mission is not just to reach the Grand Holy Hall, but to defeat the strongest body, which is the commanding Yuugenshu. It is best if you start to conserve your physical strength from now on."

"..... And so?"

"Didn't you notice the injuries located on your right shoulder and your back?"

Under the reminder of Ilis, he touched his right shoulders with his left hand. A piercing pain could be felt from his shoulder to his back, and his palm was smeared with his own blood.

He was inflicted with the injuries while fighting against the hoard of Yuugenshu at the lower levels.

"It may be a small scratch in the past, but you no longer have any shinryoku to protect yourself, thus resulting in the injuries being much more serious than before. Your shoulder and back were struck by the claws of the Yuugenshu, and the wound is probably deep enough to reach your bones."

Not just that. Upon a closer look, countless lacerations on his cheeks, arms and thighs were already swollen red. Sheltis' body was filled with injuries all over.

"You should have antihemorrhagic agent with you, right? We are about to face the commanding Yuugenshu. I advise you to proceed with the minimal amount of first aid to disinfect your wounds and

stop them from bleeding. It will all be for nothing if you are to collapse here."

"....."

Sheltis did not reply. He continued running up the evacuation stairs quietly.

"Sheltis!"

"Sorry. However, I wish to spend those time on something else instead."

Should he continue moving like that, there is a chance for his wounds to widen from his movements, resulting in more bleeding. Even if that does not happen, the constant bleeding will cause a significant impact to his mobility. Despite knowing that, Sheltis continued running up the stairs, while enduring the sharp pain coming from his back.

"But, if you continue to ignore your wounds....."

"If there is enough time, I wish to apologize to Ymy."

Just one sentence will be enough. He hoped he has the time to apologize.

For leaving her alone, for not fulfilling his promise, and causing her to be uneasy. To apologize for all that.

"..... Ymy is not angry at you, you know?"

He himself knew that very well.

She is not that type of girl. He knew that more than anything else.

"However, I still think it is important. Since I am starting all over again, I wish for it to be perfect."

"You are really stubborn."

There was a slight teasing tone in the voice of crystal-machine <Ilis>.

"I understand your personality very well. You are the type who will not budge once you have made your decision."

"I am sorry. You are just being considerate, and yet."

"I am used to it already. In return, don't complain when your wounds open up—"

Crystal-machine <Ilis> went silent all of the sudden. The timing was way too strange, so Sheltis had thought that she was suffering from a malfunction. However, the crystal portion was still flashing normally.

"The position of the commanding Yuugenshu is confirmed to be in the skies, five hundred meters above Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> — it's here."

Upon hearing that, Sheltis could feel the goosebumps on his back.

"Move quickly. Fortunately for us, there are no other readings of Yuugenshu at the higher floors. Let us head straight to the Grand Holy Hall located at two hundred and eighty-first story."

While listening to the cold echoes reverberating in the emergency passageway, Sheltis dashed upwards by leaping past roughly ten steps with each stride..... Breathing was really difficult - and it was a sort of heavy breathing not caused by fatigue.

It came from the pressure in anticipation of his fight against the commanding Yuugenshu. Should he lose, Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> will fall.

"Are you alright?"

"— I can still hold on."

He answered with a slight smile. The door leading to the two hundred and eighty-first story was just before his eyes.

Despite shouldering on the huge pressure, Sheltis had already prepared himself mentally.

"I see....."

"Ilis, what's wrong?"

The tone of crystal-machine <Ilis> reminded him of a depressed Ymy.

"Sorry, Sheltis. There is still something that I cannot bring myself to tell you. Though I should have informed you about it earlier, but I still

could not say it..... That is something which you do not know, as someone who has never stepped into the Grand Holy Hall before."

"What do you mean?"

"No, in any case, try activating the door in front of us first. What happens next will be up to fate."

As Ilis urged on, Sheltis gently pushed the door of the emergency passage.

The door opened easily. Having heard Ilis' hesitant speech, he had thought that the door would be locked up.

"Just enter via the Sacred Door of the Grand Holy Hall in front of you."

A huge door appeared in front of him - a door that no one could refrain from looking up at it in awe.

The metallic door was decorated with solemn yet clear carvings. The whole door was giving off a pale blue glow.

"A door protected by shinryoku?"

"..... The door is not locked. Try opening it."

—Zzzzzz..... zz.....

"What the.....!"

Suddenly, blueish white sparks similar to lightning was given off. He barely resisted the impact, which nearly blew him off. His hands were indeed repelled by the doors just now.

"..... Could it be, 'Elbert Resonance'.....? But at a time like this.....!"

Ignoring his burnt hands, Sheltis stared at the door before him.

Elbert Resonance.

The shinryoku of humans and mateki of Yuugenshu are two forces with totally opposite properties. When an especially strong shinryoku comes into contact with an equally strong mateki, a phenomenon will occur. The two forces will repel each other similar to the like poles of a magnet, and will even cause distortion to the laws of physics, resulting in the release of sparks.

"As I had thought..... the worst case scenario has happened."

"Ilis, what's the meaning of this?"

"The Sacred Doors of the Grand Holy Hall, holds power that is just a level lower than that of Hyouketsu Kyoukai. Meaning to say, this tightly shut door, is actually a strong shinryoku barrier by itself."

"I can see that! What I want to know is—"

"The reason for the repulsion..... Sheltis, it's because the mateki within you is overly powerful."

Mateki that is powerful enough to match the shinryoku of the Priestesses, and evoke Elbert Resonance.

"The barrier is just like a net. Smaller Yuugenshu possess weaker mateki, and thus they can slip past the holes of the net. That's because even if they pass through, they will not be much of a threat to the Priestesses or Sennenshi. However, you..... no, your mateki is viewed as a threat to the Priestesses."

The defense mechanism of the Grand Holy Hall had prevented him from passing through. Its standards for determining the rights to pass though, is if the person or thing possesses mateki that is strong enough to be of a threat to the Priestesses.

..... Just like back then.

Back when he was exiled from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. The mateki in him is viewed as a threat towards the Priestesses - no matter how much Ymy pleaded, the verdict did not change.

Everything was just like two years ago.

Ymy was just behind that door..... And the commanding Yuugenshu is about to strike.....

"..... I'll never accept this!"

This was different from two years ago. Due to him having experienced the regret of two years ago, he had returned yet again. He would not give up at a place like this.

"I—!"

He lifted both swords in his hand, and swung them at the door.

A sizzling sound. At the instant the edges of the swords struck the door, the shinryoku barrier on the door would repel them back. The sparks created by Elbert Resonance hand burnt his limbs black.

"Sheltis!"

"..... Not yet! It's not over yet!"

Grabbing on to the twin swords with his injured arms, he struck at the door again and again. However, the twin swords, which could easily break past Yuugenshu's barrier, could not even make contact with the door. They were repelled by the light barrier just before contact.

..... What can be more ironic than that?

He had rushed here to protect the Priestess, and yet he was denied entrance by Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, which viewed him as a threat to her.

In the next instant, the whole of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> shook wildly.

A deafening sound of rupture. The vibration originated from ahead of him, which is the interiors of the Grand Holy Hall. It was so violent, it was as though the outer walls of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> was blasted by a huge cannon.

"Could it be....."

Sheltis lifted his head to look upwards. The tremors had caused parts of the ceiling to peeled off in pieces.

"It's the commanding Yuugenshu. Seems like it has already crunched past the outer walls, and is infiltrating into the Grand Holy Hall—"

It was too late.

A cold shiver ran up his spine before his brain could even comprehend that.

"— Ymy!"

No matter how loudly he yelled, the tightly shut door prevented his voice from reaching in. That's right, regardless of his swords, his voice, or his longing for Ymy. Everything was crushed mercilessly by the door, and turned into nothing.

"..... Ilis!"

He shouted at crystal-machine <Ilis> in a pleading voice.

"Ilis, anything will do! Is there anyway to open this door?"

After a moment of silence.

"The only way is to rid the mateki in your body, or—"

Crystal-machine <Ilis> said wryly.

On that day

At the ends of the world—

I had definitely heard the song that flows through the Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>.

"I've got it..... There is a way, Ilis."

Letting go the swords in his hands, Sheltis focused at the door in front of him.

"What's wrong? Could it be....."

"— I have found the way to open the door."

That's right. The answer lies back then.

At the bottom of Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>.

***

Along with a crumbling sound, the outer wall of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> was reduced to rubble, scattering all over the floor.

"....."

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Despite all the rubble next to her feet, Ymy continued to focus her sight on the enemy that had appeared, following the destruction of the wall.

A pair of wings, and four thick limbs, and a lizard-like head that stretched out from within the deep purple mist.

This is a Yuugenshu which is very similar to the dragons that flew outside of the floating continent. Her body was probably about as large as the feet of the Yuugenshu. She would probably be crushed straight away if she was stepped by it.

"..... No."

Cold sweat was forming behind her neck. Up until then, they had faced quite a number of strong Yuugenshu, but none of the Yuugenshu was as overwhelming as the monster in front of them. Their face went pale.

..... No, I can't be scared. Because I am a Priestess who protects Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

Clenching her trembling hands, Ymy took a step forward towards the Yuugenshu.

A Priestess can still fight.

The baptism powers of shinryoku that can purify mateki - if that can strike the Yuugenshu directly, she would be able to defeat it. Spells of baptism are what she is the best at. She was confident that she could handle any Yuugenshu.

— However, the monster had already made its first move.

Oe/ Dia =U hiz gazzinis sis wei sighn. Quo zess wiz xes kyele
<■■……■, ■■■, ■……■……■■■, ■, ■……■>

"Mateki!"

Zzzzzz A sound of electrical discharge rang, and a cursed tone came out of the mouth of the Yuugenshu. Violet flashes of light engulfed the surroundings. The tiny thread-like rays of light entwined with each other, gradually forming into a light wave.

The floors, walls and ceilings were dyed black and slowly decaying, when coming into contact with the rays of mateki. There was no time to dodge - in the blink of an eye, the mateki had already crept close to her feet—

Just then.

A freezing cold and strong bouts of headache assaulted her.

"..... Ugh..... Ahhh.....!"

In the Grand Holy Hall filled with poisonous rays of light, Ymy collapsed onto her knees. If she had possessed shinryoku of the strength of an ordinary human, all the cells in her would have already been corrupted and decayed.

"..... B-..... But.....!"

Willing her weakened body, Ymy stood up again. No problems, I can still take this. I will probably not survive from the long exposure under the lights of mateki, but before that—

..... Thud

From her side, came a soft sound of someone collapsing.

"Syun-rei!"

The young girl had fallen to her side, her eyes closed tightly, and her greyish green lips were trembling non stop. Impossible. No matter how strong the mateki was, she could not have collapsed that quickly—

At the place of her collapse, another black stain was expanding from near her feet.

"— There's another one?"

Ymy began to activate the spell of baptism, to purify the floor Syun-rei was lying on. Under the purging lights, the Yuugenshu hiding in the floor gave a painful cry, then disappeared.

..... So there is another one hidden here.

Due to the surprise attack from below her feet, Syun-rei's barrier became unstable for a brief moment. The commanding Yuugenshu did not let that opportunity past by, and forced itself in.

"..... I am..... alright."

Syun-rei attempted to push herself up with both of her hands — how could she be fine? Her face were deathly pale, and the beads of sweat were falling off her forehead like a waterfall.

Uuooooooooo..... Ooooooooooooa.....

The thundering roar of the Yuugenshu caused a nauseating feeling to swell up in them. At the same time, a strange sound came - it sounded like the buzzing of the wings of an insect, only to be magnified louder by a hundred times. The sound gradually closed in, and gathered at the hole of the wall of the Grand Holy Hall.

That's right. It came from the hole which the commanding Yuugenshu had gnawed off.

A roar of the wind. Beyond the hole, was an endless stretch of clouds and the sky, together with the azure horizon.

Through the hole, groups of mist beasts squeezed into the Grand Holy Hall.

"It is summoning its allies.....?"

One, two, three..... Lots of smaller Yuugenshu gradually appeared around the commanding Yuugenshu. Hiding their bodies within the shroud of mist, they expressed their hostility with those crimson eyes of theirs.

More than ten Yuugenshu were there, with the commanding Yuugenshu leading the pack.

Their mouth gave off the cursed tones at the same time.

"Ugh!"

Ymy began casting the purifying spells to clean away the mateki.

..... Sa

She could hear the sound of the black haired Priestess collapsing onto her shoulder. She had not fainted yet, but it was already difficult to retain her consciousness—

..... As expected, Syun-rei could not concentrate on controlling her spells in such a situation.

On the other hand, Ymy was preparing a highly effective baptism spell which had a narrow area of effect, which can only cure the mateki on her body. If so—

"Syun-rei!"

Upon understanding that, Ymy hugged onto Syun-rei tightly. She turned her to face the Yuugenshu with her back, and positioned herself to shield Syun-rei. Also, she changed the target of her spell to Syun-rei as well.

"Ymy?"

"Don't worry, just grab onto me quickly!"

"..... No..... Stop now..... Ymy will die."

Facing a struggling Syun-rei, Ymy hugged her even more tightly.

"Syun-rei, listen to me. Don't move."

As her friend, and not as a Priestess, she was really unwilling to lose Syun-rei.

..... Because, she is a friend whom I have made, after much difficulty.

..... I don't want to be separated from my friends again. The empty feeling which I had felt two years ago, when Sheltis left Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. I don't want to experience it ever again.

"..... No..... You can't..... Ymy..... stop."

"＿＿"

Ymy bit hard on her lips, but she had no intention of loosening her arms that were hugging Syun-rei.

Behind her, were countless Yuugenshu, and the evil glow of mateki.

..... Is there really no hope?

..... Will everything end here?

If she was to collapse, then Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> will lose the Priestesses who can maintain Hyouketsu Kyoukai. Along with the vanishing of the barrier, the floating continent will be totally annihilated by the attacks of the Yuugenshu.

..... Please, anyone will do.....

..... Someone who has the ability to protect everyone on the floating continent.....

..... I beg of you—!

Strange. The face that flashed past her mind, was not that of a Priestess, nor the Queen's, nor any Sennenshi's. The face that took shape belonged to the boy, who is her childhood friend.

The blinding shine of mateki.

Lights of poison were released from the Yuugenshu before her.

— Just then.

In the radiating Grand Holy Hall, rang the sound of that melody.

Mateki — 'Seventh True Rythym <Eden Code>'.

Oe/ Dix shel =E, pile noa myizis egic
<Dreams, sinking into the crevasse of ideals>

Oe/ Dix shel =E, cross Kyel solit xes Miqis I

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<Wishes, returning to the loneliness of time>

At that instant.

All Yuugenshu stopped moving.

clar dackt, mihas /x-madel, elmei valen lihit ti-o yulis
<The shattering of the singing, the breaking of relationships, all prayers shall turn into emptiness>

Sera, X ele slin kyel cielis cley
<And I, shall head off to the place on the far side>

xeos loar sis flan-s-keen, Nel sis hiz tinny xes riris tes Zalah
<The icy-cold winds blew strongly, narrating a tale of promises and gospels>

A heart-wrenching melody that seemed to have gathered the pains and sufferings of all human beings. Despite that, there was a feeling of nostalgia at the same time, and the song was gradually filling up the emptiness in the heart—

..... Could this be a form of mateki as well?

kamis wire /x-gorn zay nazalis rei
<The rain, in the colors of sin, are causing the frames of memories to rust>

Nid hiz loar nec cross-Oz-yulis noa missis ciel
<The winds that will never come, has disappeared in the distant side>

It was totally different from the curses of Yuugenshu that she had heard up until now.

Ymy knew of another extremely similar melody. That's right, isn't that the 'Seventh Heaven Rhythm <Sophia Code>' that us Priestesses have been singing?

It forms a contrasting tone to the gentle and loving 'Seventh Heaven Rhythm <Sophia Code>'.

Just like a pair of wings. Two faces of the same coin.

Oe/ hypne Xe yanhe, ria ole /en-dackt stery
<Sleep, my body. For the shattered dreams>

Oe/ iden Xe uirse, ria elmei valen
<Sleep, my time. For all signs of prayers>

Oe/ kills Xe haul, ria mihas /x-madel zayxus
<Freeze, my lights. For the forever broken friendship>

..... But, how could this be?

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It's neither the melody, nor the lyrics. What Ymy had noticed, was the 'voice' singing it.

That was definitely not the sound given out by the Yuugenshu.

"..... It can't be....."

She couldn't believe it for a moment. The singing voice was owned by the young man whom she was most familiar with. His voice—

=E mille- Ye-hypn pheno =E Mil kiss hiz qelno, belit elmei Eden cia iden
<The soundly sleeping child of birth, please attest. Even if the paradise is to fall into total silence>

ris-ia sophia, X ele dia kyel ririsis Uls
<Even then, I will still walk to the hills of oath>

The door of the Grand Holy Hall slowly opened, along with a dull sound.

The door with powers that nearly rivals that of Hyouketsu Kyoukai. The sacred door which Yuugenshu can never open, had actually released its own seal.

As though the seals of the door has always been waiting for the moment, when a tone like that would be sung.

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Oe/ sia Eden, Ole ele, Selah pheno sia-s Orbie Cley
<For the world of all dreams>

On the other ends of the opened door, stood a young man.

Tea-red colored hair, with an expression that was pure, intimidating, and with a hint of shyness at the same time.

"....."

The young man slowly turned his body.

Ymy had forgotten to even breathe.

Because..... the man in front of her, was the person who had left Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> back then—

"Sorry, Ymy. I have..... made you wait for a long time."

With that, the young man gave a gentle smile.

The injuries on his body had dyed his shoulder red. His cheeks, arms and legs were all covered with countless scars. Even his breathing seemed laborious as well, as he required the heaving of his shoulders to assist in doing so. That look of his was not cool at all, and one could even say it was embarrassing to look at. However—

He was still smiling. His smile was cheerful, without a hint of gloominess.

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"..... Ah..... ah....."

The fluid flowing out of her eyes were gradually obscuring her sight.

No matter how much she tried to hold it in, the tears just would not stop flowing. The tight sensation inside her had disappeared in an instant. Despite the fact that nothing has ended..... but as long as he was there, it just felt like she had protected the most important thing to her.

The young man with twin swords in his hands, who had sworn to be her Sennenshi.

..... You have finally came.

Sheltis Magna Yehle was standing right there.

With that, the frozen time started spinning.

The mateki of Yuugenshu resumed their flow, and an ominous glow lit up the whole Grand Holy Hall. However, the young man with twin swords had already dashed into the hall a step earlier than them.

Two bright slashes flashed through.

The sword in his right shattered the mateki and the barrier, while the sword in his left blew the crystal core of the Yuugenshu into smithereens. Seeing that their mateki barrier was rendered ineffective, the remaining Yuugenshu fall into a state of panic. Sheltis rode on the opportunity to destroy the three crystal cores of Yuugenshu to his left and right, and back.

The young man moved at a blazing pace, and did not pause anywhere for even a second. The high speed massacre looked like a blur from afar.

"..... Amazing."

Having witnessed the swordplay and abilities of the young man, Syun-rei exclaimed in full of praise, while looking on at the side.

—Kin!

Avoiding the pounces from the Yuugenshu coming from all sides, Sheltis jumped on the candle-stands at the side walls, then leaped upwards to the ceiling. He then somersaulted in mid air, and landed behind the hoard of Yuugenshu.

The twin swords gave off a blinding flash of light.

In the blink of an eye, all the crystal cores of the smaller Yuugenshu were smashed, and they disappeared into thin air one by one.

The only one left was the commanding Yuugenshu.

However, the huge Yuugenshu was nowhere to be seen when the young man turned his body.

"..... It disappeared?"

Syun-rei looked at her surroundings with unease. The commanding Yuugenshu had disappeared without any traces or sound. Where

could it have escaped to? Even Ymy, who was watching everything from a further distance away, had no idea about that.

Just then, the loud sounds of flapping wings came from the hole in the wall of the Grand Holy Hall.

"It's outside the Grand Holy Hall. It has abandoned this place, and is planning to directly attack the Queen at the highest level!"

The cyrstal-machine <Ilis> at his chest was flashing intensely.

As the Queen was focusing on maintaining Hyouketsu Kyoukai, she was in an absolutely defenseless state. Salah-sama, the person who is constantly concerned about the floating continent, and sacrifices her everything in order to maintain Hyouketsu Kyoukai — she is about to come under attack.....

"—Sheltis!"

Ymy shouted out loudly to the young man in front of her, after having realized that.

She knew that it was extremely selfish of her, to be requesting something like that, from the young man who had been exiled from Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

..... However, I still wish to depend on him.

Because he is the only one here who can do it? No, that's wrong. Even if Leon or Run is here, I..... I'll still make my request to him.

A Priestess have to entrust her everything to her one and only Sennenshi.

— I have finally understood the meaning behind those words.

"Sheltis..... Please!"

Ymy shouted.

She was shouting to the person who she had been looking for all these while, the young man whom she can entrust her everything to.

"Please protect Salah-sama..... No, please protect the floating continent that everyone lives on!"

Her voice was nearly drowned by the raging winds that were blowing into the hole.

She did not know if her hoarse voice had reached the ears of the young man. However, Sheltis had definitely turned his head back to look at her into her eyes—

..... Sheltis smiled?

After a short pause, the young man jumped through the hole, and out of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

***

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His ears could only hear the howling winds.

There was not a single day where the winds do not blow in the floating continent. The higher one goes, the stronger the winds get. The winds at the highest story of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> is strong enough to easily blow an adult off his feet.

Sheltis was outside Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> - two thousand meters in the air. The unfiltered rays of the sun shone into his eyelids, while his body was swaying to the winds.

He continued rising with just a single leap off the grounds.

— Found it.

The commanding Yuugenshu which was located at the airspace much higher than he was, and flying towards the highest story.

However, he had stopped rising after confirming the position of the enemy. After all, what was propelling him upward was just the single leap off the Grand Holy Hall.

Under the influence of gravity, his body slowly began to fall.

Below him, were the fluffy sea of clouds. He could faintly see the buildings scattered on the ground via the gaps.

"Sheltis, act quickly!"

Acting on the reminder of Ilis, Sheltis stabbed the sword in his left hand into the walls of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. Using the sword as an bar, he pulled his body upwards with a single hand.

"This is your only chance left to jump. Good luck."

With that, Sheltis stepped on the hilt of his sword, and sprang upwards into the sky again.

The final leap. Riding on the winds that were blowing upwards of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, the young man was flung up high by the additional thrust, and he traveled to the head of the Yuugenshu.

At the same time when he passed the Yuugenshu, the sword in his right flashed violently, and swung out at the wings of the enemy with precision.

—Kin!

A dull sound rang. The sword, which had been killing Yuugenshu with a single blow, was actually repelled off.

There was a brown-yellowish luster on the wings of the monster. The cause of that was the countless reversed-scales, which formed a protective armor that is many times stronger than steel. Ordinary physical attacks will never inflict damage on it.

The enemy swung its front limbs. There was no need to confirm that with his own eyes - Sheltis could already tell from the expressions of the monster.

He switched the sword to his left hand, to counter the incoming blow. As the tip of the blade parried the limbs with ugly claws, his whole arm gave off a weird sound immediately. A great surge of pain followed as his body flew off from the impact. The sound was either his shoulder blade or muscles tearing, or perhaps it was the sound of both.

As he could not negate the force of the blow, he was smashed straight into the outer walls of the tower - just as he had noticed that, an overwhelming impact spread through his body, which nearly caused his breathing to come to a stop.

"..... Ugh..... Gya.....!"

"Sheltis!"

He had not much strength left in him to reply to Ilis.

The shoulder and back which he had injured earlier below, was giving off an incredible pain.

"..... I..... I am fine!"

The area around his shoulders were already dyed crimson red, but the young man still grabbed onto his sword. He propelled himself off the dent in the wall with the tip of his foot, and shot above the head of the commanding Yuugenshu again.

— I can't lose..... because..... this is the reason why I have came here!

A brilliant flash of the sword.

His target was the base of the Yuugenshu's wing, and it was the exact same place that he had struck earlier. The first impact had destroyed the defensive scales of the wing - this time, the sword of the young man had sliced the wing off.

————Ziiiii!

The monster roared in anger. At the same time, its body began releasing the radiance of mateki.

Locking on to the young man, who could not evade in mid air, the corrosive and poisonous rays of light began to wrap around him layer by layer - it's mateki, the unique powers of Yuugenshu. The strongest attack.

However, the Yuugenshu could see very clearly. In the midst of the purple ball of light, the sword of the young man was shining exceptionally bright.

On it, was the azure crystals that held the shinryoku of Hyouketsu Kyoukai, as well as the lights of mateki.

Two rays of light which should absolutely not be compatible with each other, were actually appearing on the sword at the same time.

"I've heard you, Ymy!"

In the next instant, Sheltis swung out the sword in his right hand.

The crystal core of the commanding Yuugenshu broke, and scattered into dust amidst a bell-like sound. At the same time, the huge body of the Yuugenshu turned into mist, and slowly disappeared into thin air.

Taking another look into the interiors of the Grand Holy Hall, one would never associate the scene with the word 'tranquil'.

The carpet on the floor were peeling off from the decay, while the lights on the ceiling had turned into a molten mess of corrosion. The candle-stands on the walls were bent due to the erosion from mateki.

— However, they were not too late.

Ymy and the Priestess in kimono attire were standing together at the center of the room. They did not suffer from any direct injuries, and the pains from mateki seemed to be disappearing as well.

That's right, I have finally protected the person most important to me.

But, why was it so? Even though everything had already came to an end, the anxiety gripping his heart did not seem to be waning. No, instead, that sort of feeling was becoming more intense, while he stood in front of her—

"Urm..... Look....."

Suppressing his painful and wildly beating heart, Sheltis squeezed his voice out.

Sheltis had no idea what he should be saying, as he faced Ymy, who had her head lowered. Despite trying his hardest to come up with something to say, the words were cut off when it reached his mouth.

"..... You are alright..... that's really great."

No, that's not it. That's not what he wanted to say. Despite knowing that, that sort of ordinary speech was all he could muster. But on the other hand, he was really glad he could finally say something.

"....."

The girl was still lowering her head, and she spoke not a single word.

"Oh..... yeah, Ymy's a Priestess now. To be speaking with you like this..... for an ordinary person like me, that is just asking for too much."

He had saved Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> from the unprecedented danger. Ymy was fine too. As long as she can continue maintaining Hyouketsu Kyoukai, the floating continent will be safe. For someone who was forced out of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, that was quite an astounding feat already.

..... I actually want to tell her badly, that I want everything to start all over again.

But that wish would never be granted. The danger had subsided, and the situation in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> was gradually stabilizing.

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So, it was time for him to go back. As an outsider, he could not stay in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> for too long.

"Ymy..... Sorry, but I cannot stay in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> much longer. I..... am going back."

He turned around, his back facing the two Priestesses, and began walking towards the door of the Grand Holy Hall.

"..... Don't go."

He had only realized that it came from Ymy, upon seeing her trying to open her trembling lips.

"I-..... Idiot..... Sheltis you huge idiot! Why..... why....."

A huge tear appeared on her lashes, and her words nearly turned into a whimper. However, the young girl continued to clench her fists tightly, and held back by clenching her teeth.

"It's so unfair..... I..... I thought you are finally willing to see me again..... And yet..... you are planning to leave without saying anything? To think that I..... has always been waiting for you....."

Sheltis finally understood.

Even though she had became a Priestess, the girl in front of him still has not changed one bit.

Even after becoming a Priestess, the girl in front of him is still waiting for him all these while.

"..... Ymy."

"Welcome back..... You have finally returned here."

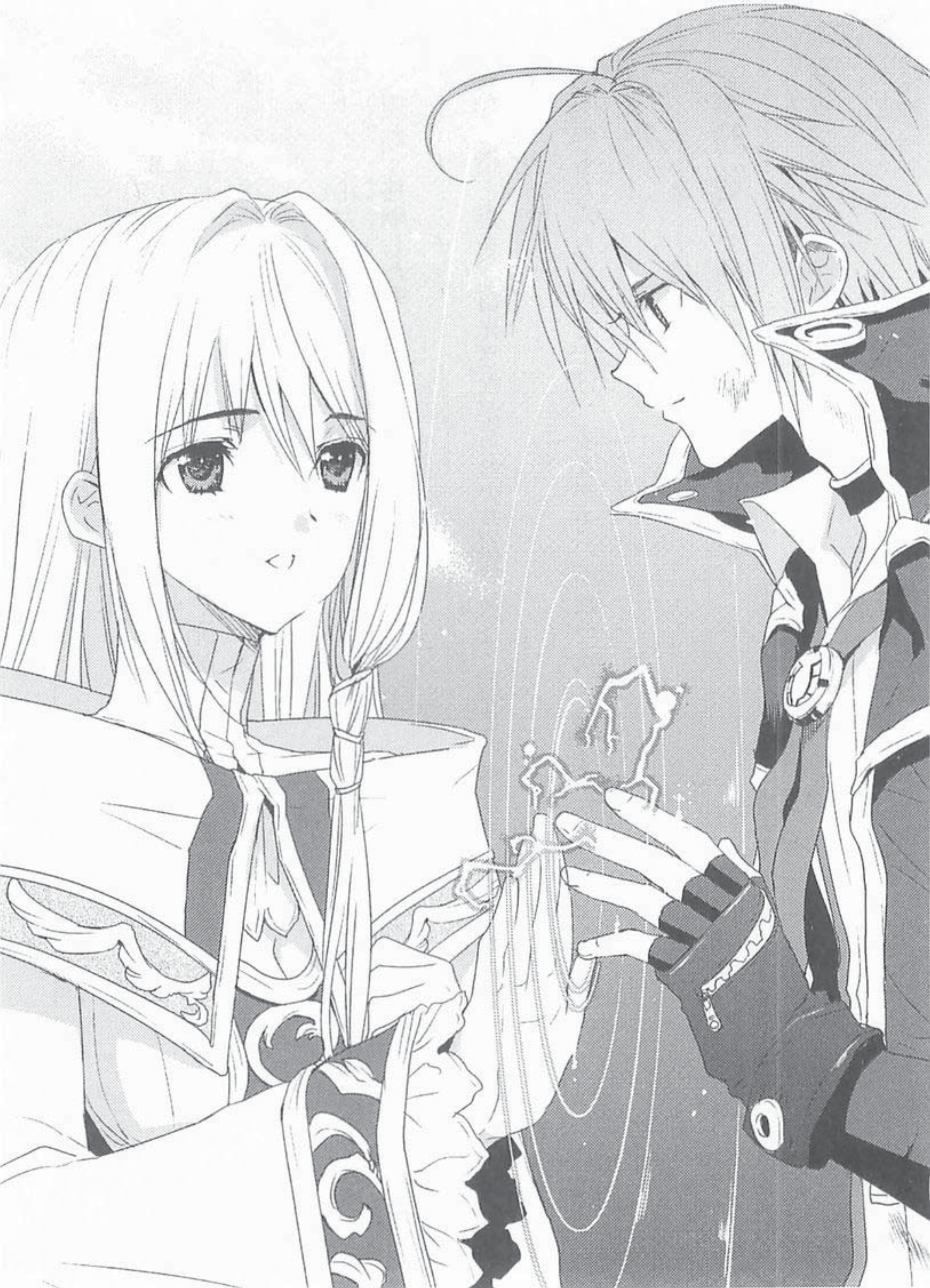
The young girl opened her arms, and began walking slowly towards Sheltis with a soft smiling expression.

In the silent hall, the two reached out their hands at each other, and their fingertips touched - just then.

At the same time, both young man and young girl remembered the tragedy two years back.

— Zzzz..... zzz.....

At the intersection between their hands, blueish-white sparks that were similar to electricity, began to form.



..... Uhh!"

The pain was so intense that they could not even cry out in pain, so who was the one who gave a moan?

Their tightly clasped hands parted reflexively, and all that remained were the barely connecting fingertips. However, the blueish-white sparks burnt their fingertips yet again.

Elbert Resonance.

When an overly strong shinryoku comes into contact with mateki, the law of physics will be twisted. Electrical discharge will be released in the air, punishing the two parties for coming into contact with burning flames.

— Zzzz..... zzz.....

The electric-esque flames mercilessly burned their reunited fingertips.

"Ah.....!"

The young girl gave a silent cry of shock, and was pushed away by a strong force.

"Ymy!"

"..... Ah..... haha....."

What replied him, was a stiff laughter.

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Plop

A bright red fluid dripped off the fingertip of the young girl. A thin red thread sank to the side of her feet, forming a pool of red liquid.

"..... It's the same..... two years ago.....?"

The originally silent Ymy lifted her head for the first time. At the same time, Sheltis finally realized what that fluid was.

It was blood.

Blood flowing from the burns of her hands, caused by the repulsion of mateki and shinryoku.

"..... Strange..... we had not done anything bad, right..... So..... why....."

A liquid flowed yet again, this time from her face.

The second liquid were sparkling, transparent drops of water.

"Ymy?"

The young girl collapsed onto her knees. Tears flowed out of her eyes continuously, like an endless stream of water.

"Why..... can't both of us..... do something as simple..... as holding hands..... Ahahaha....."

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The young girl did not made any attempt to hide her face, which was in a mess due to her slight smile and her tears. She cast away all her reservations, and said her heartfelt words.

The young girl who maintains the barrier, and is the center figure of the world; The young man who possesses mateki, and is ostracized by the world.

The two who could not touch each other, were ultimately stuck in their current position.

"..... It's really strange isn't it? Towards you, I am actually that—"

The end of that sentence was drowned in her cries.

The young girl stood up again.

However, her sight was not directed at the young man. Rather, it was directed to the black haired girl, who is similarly, a Priestess like her.

"..... Ymy."

"I know. It is already time."

The absolute time limit to the Queen's maintenance of Hyouketsu Kyoukai. The ones in charge of taking over were the two Priestesses in front of him. Meaning to say, Ymy would have to head to the highest story of the tower.

She turned around, and began walking slowly towards the elevator.

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With an indescribable melancholy, Sheltis gripped tightly onto his burnt fingers.

..... Could it be..... that we are about to be separated like this?

No, definitely not. Ymy must not have wished for such an ending as well.

"Sheltis, sorry—"

"Ymy!"

Looking at the back of the young girl, Sheltis squeezed out his remaining voice. He could not totally express his feelings in the little remaining time. Thus, he said only a single line.

"I..... will definitely not lose to the mateki within me!"

The body corrupted by mateki. He had sunk into a state of despair two years ago, due to that situation of his.

He wished to start from all over again. Even with a body occupied by mateki, for the current him..... no, that's not right. There must be things that only the current him can do.

"My body may have became like this, but I will never be defeated by such a curse! So..... I hope you can wait for me. I will definitely return back to your side!"

And this time, I must succeed.

Final Chapter

To reach the distance, where we can touch each other with our fingertips.

"....."

Ymy did not turn her head as she walked towards the elevator.

However, his voice had definitely reached her clearly.

Resolution Chapter: Shouten

− Ice cold rain.

The pain seems to go deep into the marrows just by being drenched by it. It was as though crystallized ice had rained down..... That was how icy the downpour was.

The crazy torrents were like tears of heaven, that nearly chiseled through the roofs. From the surrounding came the sound of rumbling water, which had exceeded what should be the sound of rainfalls - calling it a waterfall would have been more appropriate.

For how long had it been raining?

The rainfall from the distant borders of the sky had already broken all previous records. However, the rain did not seem to be waning at all.

da

The sound of the dripping water reverberated in the cold, bright night sky.

"The young man rejected by the world, and the young girl at the center of the world. Will the two get back together once again, after being forcefully separated two years ago—"

Beneath the stars high up in the sky, a silhouette of a woman was fiddling her black hair enticingly.

Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, two hundred and ninety-first story - the highest level.

She was in the center of the vortex of raging winds. She was standing on the tip of the tower, which is about as wide as a pin, with the tip of her foot — this lady was standing on the highest point of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

"This torrential rain is similar to that of two years ago. Is this just a coincidence?"

Her luscious lips curled upwards with a light smile. She lifted her head to look at the pitch dark sky that was releasing rain.

—A mysterious scene.

The rain bounced away from the lady's body while shining in bright light, before it even managed to strike on her.

As though there was an invisible barrier of light that separated her from the rain.

"Do you still remember? The night when you and I met in the heavy rain - the night that is the prelude to everything."

Beneath her, was a landscape consisting of countless dots of light from the living sector, flickering non stop.

There is no stairs that leads to the tip of the tower. How would she go down? No, actually, how did she get up there in the first place? These

questions seemed to be of no importance to her, as she continued to stand silently on that place.

"Fufu..... well well. It seems like my skills have worsened quite a bit, during the past two years where I have been protecting you under the guise of surveillance. Don't you agree, Sheltis?"

The woman was talking happily.

She gently encircled both her arms around her abdomen, and lifted her seductive breasts.

"However, considering that the process is not too boring, but instead, interesting, I'll not fuss too much about it. Since, it is the undisputed truth, that the floating continent has been awaiting your return."

Her gaze went even further into the skies.

She opened her arms wide, as though to entrust her tall slender body to the winds.

"This rain, this night - everything is the same as back then. Therefore, Sheltis. Representing the whole of the floating continent, I hereby welcome you again."

And then, Tsali looked into the ends of the skies.

"Welcome back. Oh young man, who had fallen into the Garden of Corrupted Song <Eden>, and returned back to the floating continent. For a thousand years, the frozen paradise have always been waiting for you—"

Epilogue: And so the young man aims for the tower

Outdoor cafe, 'The Two Swans <Albireo>'.

The cafe, which faces the main street of the Second Residential Sector, was filled with its regulars early in the morning.

"Chef— A red-tea set for table number three!"

"Thanks for your help, Yuto."

In contrast with the fully filled seats, there were only three people working in the shop. They were Eyriey and Chef, who were both busy in the kitchen, as well as Yuto, who came to help temporarily.

"Yuto is really hardworking. You will be able to rest soon, so do your best!"

"Ehehe—"

Yuto ran off happily after being praised with a pat on her head.

"Speaking of which..... Eyriey, is Sheltis taking a paid leave for today as well?"

Chef asked with a sigh, while planting her hands on her hips.

"He says he is still tired, and wants to rest for another day."

Epilogue

"That's rare, for Sheltis to be that tired. I thought being energetic is his strength."

"Well, you can't really blame him for this time."

As she stopped decorating the salad, Eyriey showed a wry smile.

..... There is probably no one who will believe it.

That the young man working in such an ordinary cafe, is actually the same person who has saved the Priestesses of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>.

"But still—! Even though you are tired!"

She hugged the tray, and clenched her fist—

"Sheltis you idiot! Going to sleep by yourself and leaving all the work to me! That's unfair!"

Eyriey shouted into the staff passageway.

"Sheltis, are you skipping work for today as well?"

"..... It's a paid leave."

In the staff's hostel.

Epilogue

The tea-red haired young man was currently lying on his bed. He opened his eyes, and his sight landed on crystal-machine <Ilis>, which was on the necklace in front of his chest.

"Then again, you went too wild this time."

"....."

"In order to destroy all Yuugenshu on the other levels, you had caused your body to suffer from plenty of injuries. Also, if not for my guidance, we won't even know if you can take the right route in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, and reach the commanding Yuugenshu in time."

"..... Urm, how should I put it....."

"In the end, your whole body is aching all over from the lack of regular exercise. You can only be resting in bed like this, for these three days."

"..... Uh..... things like this....."

"I've heard that Leon has resumed his own training regime the day after the battle was over, as though nothing had happened in the first place."

"....."

"There really is not a single redeeming quality in you, Sheltis."

"Shut up."

Epilogue

He turned over, and buried his face into the pillow—

"However, you are undoubtedly the one who has protected Ymy. You should be proud of yourself for that, you know?"

Crystal-machine <Ilis> said that in a slightly teasing voice. She then continued.

"The three days period of praying for the Priestesses is already over. From today onward, the Queen shall resume the maintenance of Hyouketsu Kyoukai. You can go to see Ymy again."

That's right. It had already been three days since the collapse of Hyouketsu Kyoukai and the invasion of Yuugenshu.

Thinking back, if felt as though the catastrophe had just happened yesterday. The contamination of the streets, as well as the destruction - however, human beings are still living on. Everyone was working hard to purify the contaminated roads, as well as repairing the destroyed facilities.

"That is the case, but..... it just feels a little embarrassing."

The scene at Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, where he saw off Ymy. As the two of them did not have the chance to speak with each other properly, it felt a little awkward to be looking for her now.

"You are a really spineless man."

"I'll go. I'll go..... but give me some time to prepare myself mentally."

Epilogue

Just then, cheers could be heard in the direction of the cafe.

"Hmm? What's happening?"

Sheltis got up from bed, and listened intently towards the cafe. What was happening? It felt like there was a sort of uproar or something.

"Oi— Sheltis."

He could hear a flurry of steps, and the door of his room opened. A girl in overalls and apron popped her head into the room.

"What's up, Eyriey?"

"You have a visitor. Well then, I'll make my move. You two take your time."

A visitor? He did not remember arranging to meet with anyone today - just as he was confused about the situation, a girl walked slowly into the room.

She was wearing a huge sun hat, coupled with a white dress. Her face was obscured by the shadows of the hat, but her long hair was giving off a golden luster from the rays of the lights.

"May I ask..... who are you?"

"....."

Epilogue

The young girl did not say a word. Suddenly, without warning, she grabbed a small cushion from the chair, and threw it at Sheltis with all her strength.

"Wait! W-Whoa.....! What's with this?"

"Idiot, I thought you will be there at Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>..... I've waited there for nearly a day, and yet you don't seem to be appearing anytime soon!"

The girl seemed furious. Beneath the hat, was the face of the girl that he is familiar with.

"..... Ymy?"

For a while, Sheltis could not believe that she was standing right in front of him.

It would be easy for her to find out where he is living at. However, as the Priestess of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, there should not be much chances for Ymy to visit the living sector.

"Follow me."

"Eh?"

"Stop asking, and just come with me!"

Seeing that Ymy had already started walking away, Sheltis could only follow behind her.

Epilogue

She stepped into a dark alley via the back door for staff, and headed off in the direction of north. The looks of her silent back suggested that Ymy was still fuming with anger.

"..... Ymy, are you angry at me?"

At that instant, Ymy stopped in her tracks.

"I had prayed for Hyouketsu Kyoukai for three days, thinking that a certain someone will be there waiting for me once I am done with it. However, I had waited and waited, and the person just would not appear."

The young girl showed the side of her face. Her eyes were puffy from fatigue.

..... So she has been waiting for me all this time.

The Priestesses cannot eat or sleep, as they prayed continuously for the whole of three days to maintain Hyouketsu Kyoukai. Despite her being in a state of exhaustion, Ymy still suppressed her fatigue and waited for his visit with anticipation.

"..... Sorry."

"It's fine. Actually, I am not really angry."

As she took off her hat, Ymy flashed a mischievous smile.

Epilogue

"It has been a long time since I have been to the living sector. Due to me being confined in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, I am really glad to be able to take a stroll like this."

The young girl sounded especially delighted.

"..... Oh right, can I ask you something?"

That was something concerning her. For the past three days, Sheltis was really concerned about it.

"Is Hyouketsu Kyoukai alright? Should it be breached again the next time—"

"We have changed the wavelength of the shinryoku used in the barrier, so the same method of breaking through Hyouketsu Kyoukai should not work again. Also, even though it is an additional burden to us, we have added in yet another cycle of rites into the spell of the barrier."

Ymy said tirelessly.

"Sorry, I can't understand a single thing which you had just said."

"Fufu, am I more and more like a Priestess already?"

She made a spin on the spot, and her dress flared along with her motion.

Epilogue

Different from the vestment, that attire should be something that is worn while in disguise. The cheers back at the cafe should be the civilians realizing her real identity.

"..... Speaking of which, where are we going?"

"It's a secret. But it is not a place to be suspicious about."

The two of them walked through the empty alleys, and moved forward one step at a time. The dark alleys were definitely nowhere near 'clean', but there were still a bounce in her every step.

— A place where no one can see them, a time spent where no one can disturb them.

How long has it been, since the last time they had walked together by themselves like this? Sheltis thought to himself: the reason for Ymy picking that route, was probably due to her thinking of the same thing as him.

As they walked on.

Unknowingly, a tall tower which shoots into the sky, appeared before Sheltis.

"Alright, we are here."

As she stood before the pristine white tower, Ymy opened her arms out wide.

"Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>?"

Epilogue

"Yes. Follow me."

The place which is surrounded by huge protective walls. She walked to the main gate. None of the guards at the entrance were surprised at his presence - perhaps they were already informed about it before hand.

"Sorry for waiting. I've brought him here!"

A huge space covered by fresh turfs of grass.

As she went through the main gate, Ymy waved at the four people before her.

"That's quick."

The silver haired young man, who was standing with his arms crossed, was the first person to greet back with a raise of his arm.

"Leon?"

"It's Syun-rei. She really wish to thank you."

Behind the bitterly smiling Leon, was an extremely shy black haired girl. Sheltis remembered that she was the Priestess who was together with Ymy at the Grand Holy Hall.

"..... Uh..... Urm..... Thank..... you....."

Epilogue

After gently bowing her head as thanks, the young girl hastily hid herself behind Leon's back again.

"Hi— we meet again. You are Sheltis huh?"

A young girl in the coat of Sennenshi was greeting him from the side without reservations.

"Eh? You are the girl back at the Third Living Sector?"

"Yes, name's Run. Thanks to you knocking my subordinate out cold, there was not a single life lost! Well, about half of them are still in the hospital, but they should be up and running in about a week."

The girl gave a cheerful smile. Beside her, was a comparatively more mature lady dressed in a gown. She slowly walked towards him.

"That's right— I was really shocked when you appeared. Thanks for your help—"

Speaking with a slightly lazy tone, the lady gave a slight bow of appreciation.

"I am Priestess Meimel— nice to meet you. You are the childhood friend of Ymy, right? No wonder you had bathed with her since young—"

"..... Wa! Meimel, when had I said things like that?"

"Ara ara— isn't that the truth? Don't be so angry, Ymy."

Epilogue

The tall Priestess tried placating the fuming Ymy.

"Alright, joke's over - I am really grateful towards you. As the representative of all Priestesses, I thank you once again. Ymy had already told me about the things you had done to your credit. Also, Queen Salah wishes to thank you personally as well. I think there should be plenty of opportunity to see her personally, once you are living in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>."

..... Living in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>? What does she mean? I am an ordinary citizen living in the living sector, so I should not have the chance to see the Queen again.

"Ymy, what's going on?"

"You know, I was not the only one who was paying close attention to you, as you were heading to the peak of the tower."

Spinning the hat with her fingertip, Ymy winked suggestively.

"Just as Meimel had said, Syun-rei and I had informed Meimel and Run telepathically about how you have saved Syun-rei and me, as well as how you have defeated the commanding Yuugenshu. So, everyone here is a witness — go ahead, Leon."

"Oh right, I have nearly forgotten to return you this."

Leon tossed out something.

Under the bright sun, a glittering silver badge flew in an arc, before landing in Sheltis' hands.

Epilogue

A familiar name was carved on the badge.

"This is..... my badge?"

It was the badge confiscated from him two years ago. Sheltis thought it had already been destroyed.

"It took me, Ymy, Syun-rei, Meimel and Run quite a bit of effort - the five members of the highest positions in Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> have banded together. Even though we could not retrieve back the deleted data of your past, we have still managed to get a place for you within the cadets of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>. You will have to start from the lowest position."

Having heard all that, Sheltis took another look at his own badge.

The rank beneath his name was blank, while the date of entering the tower was the date of today. Beneath all that, was the carving of personal signature of the Queen. Which means—

"..... It can't be? But I..... can I really?"

Nervousness and shock caused him to speak in stutters.

As someone who was permanently expelled, he was about to become a guard of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia> yet again.....

"Hurry up and return to my side. Training is hardly challenging without you as my opponent."

Leon tossed something else to him. There were two objects this time, and they were significantly bigger than his badge.

The hilts of the blades which he could not be more familiar with.

"Here's the swords you were using three years ago. It's not like I can do much with it."

After determining their traveling path with his eyes, Sheltis grabbed onto one sword in each of his hands. A sense of security came from their weight, along with their nostalgic touch.

"Of course, I will be in charge of reconstructing the blades. From today onward, I may be accompanying you for quite a long time. Don't ever leave me by myself and disappear for a few years again."

"..... Mmm."

He gently touched crystal-machine <Ilis> with his fingertips.

"Sheltis."

Ymy pointed to the highest story of the tower.

"I am already a Priestess. Therefore—"

Following her line of sight.

Standing beneath Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, Sheltis lifted his head to look at the tip of the tower as well.

Epilogue

"I will be waiting for you at the top. You must come quickly this time! Understand?"

The meaning behind those words may not be as simple as him reaching the highest story of the tower.

But to actually reach the highest class of guards of Tenketsu Palace <Sophia>, and be the person protecting the Priestesses of Orbie Clar - a Sennenshi.

— This time, I will wait for you to be my Sennenshi.

Ymy pointed to the sky. There was a sense of joy amid her shyness.

"..... Yeah."

Looking at her, Sheltis replied with a strong nod of his head. That's right, even if his body is carrying mateki, there are still things that only he himself can do. There, let's redo everything all over again.

It is fine starting from the lowest class, and it matters not regardless of how long he takes.

One day—

"I will reach there. This time, I must reach the peak of the tower."